

CASE NO. 39

by RAY WRIGHT

02/06/06

INSPIRED BY REAL EVENTS

Pitch black. We hear FOOTSTEPS sneaking up an old wooden staircase. Two people moving as one.

Topping the stairs, they creep down the hall to the closed door that protects us. We can hear them behind it, whispering, bickering insanely, one shushing the other.

The squeak of a door knob slowly turning. The faint click of the latch. And the door inches open, throwing a razor-thin shaft of light into the darkness where it illuminates a

FRIGHTENED EYE

As a ten-year-old GIRL sits up in bed. Dead tired. Staring at the two dark faces peering in at her.

GIRL
I can see you...

And the door closes, leaving us once more in total darkness. We can hear them bickering again as they shuffle away, their footsteps descending the stairs, fading into the uneasy silence of this old house...

INT. FIFTH GRADE CLASSROOM, LOS ANGELES - DAY

A young teacher (DARLA) chalks a lesson on a blackboard in a sun-drenched Los Angeles classroom.

DARLA
-- and we know from yesterday that the
base of a triangle times half the height
equals the area.

A girl in the back row raises her hand.

DARLA
Yes, Mia?

GIRL
Lucy's asleep again.

Darla puts down the chalk and comes up the aisle to where a slight, fair-skinned girl in a thrift shop dress sleeps head down on her desk. The girl from the opening scene. LUCY SHERIDAN. Darla stands over her with obvious concern. Puts a finger to her lips to quiet the giggles.

DARLA
Let her sleep.

She draws the shade. It drops a shadowbox on the sleeping girl.

INT. COUNSELING ROOM, DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES, LOS ANGELES - DAY

A former gang member sitting with his wife and troubled eight-year-old son. The MARTINEZ FAMILY. A family in crisis. Sitting opposite is an LA County social worker. Twenties. Attractive but overworked. EMILY.

GANG MEMBER

He would just go off, you know, start tearin' the place down. You didn't even know why he was doin' it half the time, you just got out of his way...

EMILY

And what you learned from your father now Diego's learning from you...?

It's painful for him to hear that. He loves his son, quit the streets for him. Overcome by emotion, he nods yes.

EMILY

That really upsets you, doesn't it?

He wipes his eyes on his tattooed arm.

GANG MEMBER

Yeah. Cuz I mean I don't want him to be like me.

The boy looks at his father, has never seen him cry before.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Outside the conference room, Emily musses the boy's hair.

EMILY

A whole week without skipping school? Is that true?

He smiles, nods. A glimpse of the boy he might have been.

EMILY

That's the last time I make a bet with you.

(to his parents)
See you guys next week.

The Martinez family heads down the hall, Diego lagging behind. Emily watches with guarded optimism, knowing their chances. Then turns to the NEXT FAMILY, welcoming the beleaguered mother:

EMILY
You cut your hair. It looks great.

INT. EMILY'S CUBICLE - DAY

The hurried opening and closing of files reveals PHOTOS of abused children. Bruises. Cuts. Broken bones. Emily trying to locate a single case amid the stacks and clutter on her desk. An angry mother SCREAMING at her on the phone:

EMILY
No one is trying to steal your child,
they found bruises and cigarette burns --
Mrs Lynch, I read the medical report --
well, if you feel you need legal
representation that's perfectly within
your rights...

A flurry of obscenities followed by a dial tone. Emily puts the phone down. Sighs wearily.

WAYNE (O.S.)
One less Christmas card for Emily.

Her supervisor WAYNE, forties, gay, leaning in the doorway.

WAYNE
How many active cases you have?

EMILY
Thirty-eight.

He drops another file on her desk.

EMILY
No, absolutely not, look at this, Wayne,
look, I'm buried --

WAYNE
Sorry, Em, we all are.

He walks off. Emily shoves the new file onto the shelf above her desk. Looks at it guiltily. Takes it down again. Handwritten on the front: SHERIDAN, LUCY.

She opens it. A school portrait of ten-year-old Lucy clipped to the preliminary report. The sad face draws Emily in.

EXT. WILSHIRE BLVD - DAY

An old VOLVO WAGON skirts rush hour traffic on Wilshire. Faded red paint. Ski rack on the roof. An ancient bumpersticker says Educate.

INT. VOLVO WAGON - DAY

iPod jacked into the car stereo playing hip alternative MUSIC, Emily leans on an elbow as she drives, not crazy about L.A. but at ease with herself.

EXT. EMILY'S HOUSE - DAY

Emily's red Volvo wagon turns in the drive of a single-person home she rents in a working-class neighborhood.

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE - DAY

Cozy. Her haven. Light colors offset dark hardwood floors. Emily comes in, stack of files under her arm. Tired. Long day. Drops the files in a chair. Sprinkles some food in a fish tank. Referees through the glass.

EMILY

Don't fight. Hey, that's his.

Turns on the tv. World news. Violence. People suffering. Turns it off. Puts on some quiet music. Hits play on her answering machine as she flops down barefoot on the sofa with a magazine, peeling an orange, decompressing.

YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE

Hey, it's Suze, missed you at yoga the other day, give me a call.

BEEP.

YOUNG WOMAN'S VOICE #2

Hi, Em, Jackie, just checking in, hope you're good.

BEEP. A charming male voice:

DOUG'S VOICE

Exhausted, her career path questionable, her faith in mankind shaken, she resisted her tendency toward introspection and went to have a drink with her friend Doug.

BEEP. Emily gives a tired sigh. Faint smile under it.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Noisy, trendy downtown bar. Professional type on a bar stool. Thirties. Handsome. DOUG. He laughs when he sees Emily.

DOUG

I am so in your head.

She gives him a kiss. Sits down beside him.

EMILY

Be honest. The whole psychology thing,
it's just about scoring chicks, isn't it?

DOUG

Regrettably, yes.

They share a laugh. He gestures to the bartender for another beer.

EMILY

You know what freaks me out?

DOUG

That you have a four-year degree and make
seventeen grand a year after taxes?

EMILY

I sit there talking to these families,
you know, like I'm some expert. My
family's a train wreck. I mean, I had
this moment today where I realized I
might be totally full of it.

DOUG

Everybody's full of it. In the end
you're a number to call for people who
don't have anyone else. There's no way
that's bad.

Emily nods, appreciates that. Recognizes a girl going by in the crowd. A friend from school. Well-dressed. Career-oriented. The track Emily might be on if she weren't a social worker.

EMILY

Hey Becca...

FRIEND

(hugging her)

Hey. So one of us is a major screwup, I
can't remember if I was supposed to call
you or the other way around...?

EMILY

No, it's me, it's just been a crazy
couple weeks. You remember Doug.

FRIEND

(handshake)

Hi.

(then to Emily)

Listen, my ride's leaving, let's catch up soon, okay?

Emily nods okay. The girl departs. Emily's beer arrives. Doug hands it to her.

DOUG

So anyway, I've done some soul searching and I just want to say that if a full-on relationship feels like too much right now, I'd be willing to consider a purely physical one.

Emily, sipping her beer, smiles.

DOUG

Hey, you might actually enjoy yourself.

EMILY

I'm sure I would, I just...

Hard to explain. Doug saves her the trouble.

DOUG

I know, I know, the job, you get home you don't have anything left.

Emily nods yeah, leans in closer, the friendly banter giving way to a moment of real sincerity.

EMILY

If it were anyone, it'd be you.

They exchange a look then Doug clinks his glass against hers. And as they drink together after a long day, more than friends, less than lovers...

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Emily in glasses, reading the Sheridan file on her bed. The preliminary report concerns her: "Socially withdrawn. Lack of appetite. Sleeping at school..."

Her gaze returns to Lucy's photo. Sadly, under her breath:

EMILY

What are they doing to you?

EXT. SHERIDAN HOUSE - DAY

A dark, rundown family home on a once-prosperous cul de sac. Emily pulls up. Gets out. Checks that she has the right address. Halfway up the walk something stops her dead in her tracks -

A WOMAN'S FACE

staring at her through one of the lacy white curtains upstairs. Ghostly pale. Gone as soon as she sees it. Emily stands frozen for a moment. Walks on.

She reaches to knock on the door and it opens abruptly, the security chain snapping taut. A woman's voice growls at her from the darkness inside:

WOMAN'S VOICE

What?

EMILY

Emily Jennings. Child Services? We spoke on the phone...?

Peering through the crack is the pallid, bony face from the upstairs window. Lucy's mother. MARGARET SHERIDAN.

MARGARET

You said the seventeenth.

EMILY

Today is the seventeenth.

MARGARET

Is not.

EMILY

I'm sorry, but it is.

MARGARET

Friday was the thirteenth.

Emily, rather amazed at the conversation she's having, takes a newspaper from her bag. Indicates the date.

EMILY

Friday was the fourteenth, that makes today the seventeenth. Monday the seventeenth. The date of our appointment.

The door closes in Emily's face. What the hell? Then we hear the chain unlock. It opens again.

And we get our first good look at Lucy's mother. Gaunt. Pale. Dark rings under her eyes. She steps aside, not welcoming Emily in, merely allowing her to enter.

INT. SHERIDAN HOUSE - DAY

It's dark, the curtains drawn. Margaret twitches one open in begrudging courtesy. The house is tidy but sad, steeped in a kind of puritanical gloom. Lucy peers down through the upstairs banister, anxious, unsure what's going on. Emily sees her, smiles.

EMILY

Come down, I'd like to meet you.

Lucy hesitates, sensing her mother's disapproval. Comes slowly down the stairs. Emily shakes her hand.

EMILY

My name's Emily. What's yours?

LUCY

Lucy.

EMILY

Pretty name. Pretty girl.

Lucy turns shyly away.

EMILY

(to Margaret)

Is there somewhere we can talk?

Margaret sighs and heads down the hall.

INT. LIVING ROOM, SHERIDAN HOUSE - DAY

Emily, file in hand, trying to project professionalism in an arm chair that tilts to one side. Margaret and Lucy sitting opposite on the sofa.

EMILY

When do you expect your husband back?

Margaret shrugs.

EMILY

Because we've found it's more beneficial if the whole family participates.

MARGARET

Well he's not home so...

Shrugs again.

EMILY

Do you have any way of contacting him?

MARGARET

Not if I don't know where he is.

Just then we hear a POWER TOOL go on in the basement. Emily, sensing the lie, indicates the floor.

EMILY

Is that...?

Margaret averts her eyes.

EMILY

Would you ask him to join us?

MARGARET

He doesn't have anything to say.

EMILY

Would you ask him?

Margaret weighs Emily's resolve, gives Lucy a cautionary glance then exits. We hear her open a door and holler into the basement over the noise of the power tool.

MARGARET (O.S.)

Edward! EDWARD!

The power tool stops.

MARGARET (O.S.)

That lady's here. From the state. She wants to talk to you.

We hear an angry unintelligible reply.

MARGARET (O.S.)

I already told her, she wants to anyway.

We hear the power tool get thrown aside. FOOTSTEPS pounding up the cellar stairs. Emily's and Lucy's faces reflect the same simple fear. Their eyes meet.

EMILY

It'll be okay.

Lucy not so sure. The FOOTSTEPS are upon them. EDWARD SHERIDAN makes his entrance. A menacing man with a gaunt face and dark deep-set eyes. Emily holds out her hand.

EMILY
Hi, I'm Emily --

Edward forgoes the handshake, his contempt obvious. Sits beside Lucy on the sofa. Margaret sits on the other side. Lucy tenses, trapped between them. Emily speaks with kindness and composure. Hostile encounters part of the job.

EMILY
I'm here today because Lucy's school is concerned about changes they're seeing in her academic performance. The kinds of changes they're seeing are often associated with family problems.

Edward leans over and whispers something caustic in Margaret's ear.

MARGARET
Eddie says we don't have family problems.

EMILY
That's just it, many times a family won't even know they're having problems until it's too late. That's where we come in. We help families communicate and learn healthier ways of resolving conflict.

Edward whispers again in Margaret's ear.

MARGARET
Eddie says we don't need your help.

EMILY
Mr Sheridan, is there some reason you won't speak to me directly?

Edward just stares at her.

EMILY
(to Margaret)
Is there some reason why your husband won't speak to me directly?

Margaret nods, gives Edward a look as though for permission.

MARGARET
Eddie doesn't like speakin' out of anger.

Emily does well to hide her fear. Refusing to be intimidated, she engages Edward's stare. A battle of wills. But his gaze has a murderous intensity she can't match. She looks down, shuffling papers. Battle lost.

INT. CHILD SERVICES - NIGHT

Emily follows Wayne along a row of cubicles after hours. He's dropping files on desks. The new cases never stop.

WAYNE

No laws against being weird, Em. Send it over to CMC, we'll do a follow-up in a month.

EMILY

I didn't say weird, I said scary. The guy sat there the entire time staring at me, the mother is like his emotional slave.

Wayne pauses in mock bewilderment.

WAYNE

Wait, did you just fly to New York and meet my parents?

EMILY

Wayne, this girl's in trouble. I can feel it.

Beneath Wayne's humor, a sober, hard-learned practicality.

WAYNE

Wanna know what I can feel? The lawsuit we're gonna get hit with if we violate her parents' rights without any evidence they've done something wrong.

EMILY

Every time I talk to you you sound more like a lawyer, you know that?

WAYNE

Yeah, well, maybe because every time I make an emotional decision I get called by one. I'm sorry, you're gonna have to let this one go.

EMILY

You put these files in front of me and you ask me to tell you what's going on. Well, I'm telling you, there's something going on and it's not something good. I've done my job, I've told you, what you do with it is yours.

She walks off. Wayne alone after hours with his conscience.

INT. CORRIDOR, CHILD SERVICES - DAY

The elevator doors open with a DING and Edward and Margaret Sheridan step out in their Sunday best. Benevolent faces. Lucy between them, ribbon in her hair, brand new dress, appearing coached as she eats an ice cream cone.

Emily, disgusted by the charade, trades looks with the parents as they go past.

INT. PRIVATE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Gazing fondly at Lucy, Edward directs his comments at Wayne, who sits opposite the family with Emily.

EDWARD

They really are God's miracles. Day she was born was the happiest day of our lives. We're not perfect parents, we know that, but we figure if you let 'em know how much you love 'em a lot of the other stuff takes care of itself.

Wayne nods his agreement. Edward puts his arm around Lucy for effect. Her eyes go to Emily. A silent plea for help.

EMILY

(hostile)

Tell me, Mr Sheridan, since you've suddenly acquired the power of speech, doesn't it concern you a little that Lucy's grades have gone from A's to D's in three months?

EDWARD

Course it does, she's our daughter.

With a glance Wayne cautions Emily about her tone of voice.

EMILY

So you have no idea why she's falling asleep at school every day? Why she's not able to sleep at home?

Edward looks at Margaret, then Emily, affects bewilderment.

EDWARD

Bad dreams?

INT. BREAK ROOM - DAY

Emily and Wayne in private conversation. She's pissed off. The Sheridan family in the other room, preparing to leave.

EMILY

He's gonna be having bad dreams when he gets hit with child endangerment.

(off Wayne's reluctance)

Don't tell me you're buying this daddy's little girl routine?

WAYNE

So they're overcompensating a little.

EMILY

A little? Let me talk to her. Alone. She wants to talk.

WAYNE

Em --

EMILY

Five minutes. Talk to them about how much they love kids.

She goes out the door.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Emily walks with Lucy, looking for a way in.

EMILY

I knew someone at school named Lucy, she was a writer. Do you ever write? I do sometimes, it helps me sort out how I'm feeling.

Lucy doesn't take the bait. She stops for a drink at a water fountain. Emily bends for a sip after. Misfires. As she wipes her face, embarrassed:

EMILY

Okay, I just shot like a gallon of water up my nose. So much for establishing trust.

Lucy smiles, for the first time. It's the opening Emily was looking for. Maintaining that precious eye contact, deepening it:

EMILY

What's happening to you? I can help. Let me help.

Lucy looks away, eyes brimming with tears.

EMILY
What is it, sweetheart?

LUCY
They hate me.

She lowers her head in shame, tears rolling down.

EMILY
I'm sure they don't hate you.

LUCY
They do. I hear them. They go in the
cellar and talk.

EMILY
What do they talk about?

LUCY
Sending me to hell.

Emily's mouth falls open.

EMILY
You've heard them say that?

Lucy nods. As Emily registers this in quiet horror...

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

A tape recorder is running. Emily and Wayne alone with Lucy.
She's hesitant to speak, naturally distrustful.

EMILY
It's okay. You can tell him. He's on
our side.

WAYNE
Did you hear your parents say they were
going to hurt you?

Nobody sees what Lucy sees at this moment. Edward glaring in
at her through the window. Lucy looks at Wayne, shakes her
head. Wayne looks at Emily, case closed.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Emily watches in agony as the Sheridan family steps into the
elevator. Parent on each side, Lucy gives her one last
pleading look then the elevator doors close and she's gone.

INT. WAYNE'S OFFICE - DAY

Emily and Wayne in the heat of an argument.

EMILY

She doesn't trust anybody. You think I made it up?

WAYNE

I think you'd do just about anything you had to do to help a child you thought was at risk. Here are the facts, Emily. They haven't laid a finger on her that we can tell. And we have no proof they intend to. Meanwhile on your desk right now are thirty-plus cases of actionable abuse. What about those?

EMILY

I'm not giving up on her, Wayne.

WAYNE

Yes, you are, you're leaving this alone.

A look that says he means it.

EMILY

I hope you can live with a dead child on your conscience.

WAYNE

(hurt)

That's a little unfair, don't you think? I care about these kids as much as you do, but we can't go around yanking them out of their homes on a hunch. Parents, even bad ones, have rights, that's how the laws of this great land are written.

Emily gives a resigned nod, backing away from him, from the job, all of it.

EMILY

So that's it? We let kids get killed until they rewrite the goddamn laws?

She exits before he can answer, doesn't want to hear it.

INT. DETECTIVE BARRON'S OFFICE, POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Detective MIKE BARRON. Veteran of the force. Man of quiet faith.

A well-built silver-haired family man who played fullback at Brigham Young. He's doing paperwork. Smiles warmly as Emily enters.

BARRON

Was just thinking about you, got a nice letter from Sandy Hutchinson...

She drops Lucy's file on his desk. Whatever Barron was going to say is no longer relevant. Soberly, after a pause:

BARRON

Well, it's sitting in front of me which means our good friend Wayne thinks it fails to meet the criteria for child endangerment and has told you in no uncertain terms to leave it alone...?

EMILY

Surprise, surprise.

She starts to open the file. Barron stops her.

BARRON

I can't, Emily. I'm sorry.

EMILY

Mike, I'm desperate here.

Tense beat. The need for privacy now apparent, Barron gets up and closes his door. Sits down at his desk again.

BARRON

You know how dear to my heart the work you do is, but the department doesn't pay me to stakeout potential child abusers. Last time almost cost me my job.

EMILY

This girl heard her parents say they're going to send her to hell.

BARRON

Sickening as that is, you're a part of the system that handles those situations, I'm not.

EMILY

The system is broken.

BARRON

Maybe you just need to let it work.

EMILY

What? Jesus, I feel like I'm talking to Wayne. You don't want to get involved, fine, but don't bullshit me, I'm running out of people I respect.

BARRON

Okay. No bullshit. Give me evidence of a crime, I'll be all over it. Till then there's nothing I can do.

CUT TO:

The blade of a circular saw SCREAMS through a pinewood board, spitting sawdust...

A ten-pound hammer CRUSHES the head of a nail, sinking it, CRUSHES another, CRUSHES another, the speed of the handiwork conveying its urgency...

INT. SHERIDAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Lucy peering into the basement through an air vent in the floor, vertical bands of light on her face. Edward hammering down below. He steps aside and we see what he's making...

A HOMEMADE COFFIN

Sensing Lucy's stare, he glances up over his shoulder. And Lucy ducks out of sight, breath held.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

Children waiting for the bus after school. Talking, laughing. Lucy stands apart, tired and solemn. The bus pulls up to the curb. As she goes to get on:

EMILY (O.S.)

Lucy.

She turns. Emily behind her.

EMILY

I just wanted you to know I haven't forgotten about you. I'm doing everything I can.

Lucy hugs her, clinging for a moment.

LUCY

If I disappear will you come look for me?

EMILY
You're not going to disappear.

LUCY
If I do?

Emily holds her gaze, seeing the fear. Backing away, Lucy indicates the bus.

LUCY
I have to go. They get mad when I miss the bus.

Lucy turns to go. Emily watches. Helpless.

EMILY
Lucy, wait...

Takes her cell phone from her bag. Puts her number on speed dial.

EMILY
If anything happens, call me, okay? Just press this. Don't let your parents know you have it.

Tucks the cell phone in Lucy's coat pocket.

EMILY
I'm gonna get you out of there, I promise.

Lucy boards the bus. Waves to Emily from a back window as it drives away. Emily waves back, heart in her throat. Might be the last time she sees her alive.

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A sleepless night finds Emily slouched on her sofa, leaving a message:

ANSWERING MACHINE
Hey, this is Doug, here it comes -

BEEP.

EMILY
It's me, thought you might be up, um, anyway, call if you get this.

Hangs up. Clicks on the tv remote. Channel-surfs. World news. Cooking show. Home shopping network.

Hip-hop music video. Watches it for a moment. Gangster with a mic. Scantily-clad girls shaking their asses.

The phone RINGS. Emily mutes the tv, picks up.

EMILY

Too late, I met someone else...

A child's whisper.

LUCY (V.O.)

Emily...?

EMILY

(concerned but calm)

Lucy? Are you okay?

LUCY (V.O.)

I'm scared...

EMILY

Why? Why are you scared, honey?

LUCY (V.O.)

They're waiting to get me, I can hear them... I'm sorry...

EMILY

Why are you sorry?

LUCY (V.O.)

I'm falling asleep...

EMILY

Okay, listen, I want you to go over and open the window. Can you do that?
Lucy...?

LUCY (V.O.)

(softly; drifting off)

I'm soooooorry...

EMILY

Lucy, no, wake up!

INT. LUCY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The cell phone lying on the bed at Lucy's fingertips.

EMILY

(from phone)

Lucy...?!

The illuminated screen casts an eerie glow on her SLEEPING FACE.

INT. EMILY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Emily drops the phone. Moment of panic. Then a decision. Throws a coat on over her bed clothes. Grabs the phone again, dials a number in desperation.

EMILY

Mike, it's Emily, listen, that girl I
told you about, I think she's in trouble -
- yeah, I know what you said, but --
Mike, you're not listening --
(loses it)
HELP ME!

EXT. EMILY'S CAR - NIGHT

Emily fumbles with her keys. Gets the right one in the door. Opens it. Jumps in. Starts the engine. Peels off down the road.

INT. LUCY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The cell phone turns itself off, plunging the room into total darkness.

In BLACK, we hear FOOTSTEPS coming up the stairs. Down the hall. Stopping at the door. The knob turning. The click of the latch. The door opening. A shaft of light. Edward and Margaret peering in with frenzied anticipation:

Lucy is asleep. The time has come.

INT. EMILY'S CAR - NIGHT

Emily red-lines the tachometer, doing ninety down the freeway.

INT. STAIRWAY - NIGHT

Slowly, quietly, Edward descends the stairs with Lucy asleep in his arms. Margaret in front of him, moving in tandem, holding a roll of duct tape.

They reach the bottom. Margaret rushes ahead into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Edward carries Lucy toward the OLD GAS OVEN where Margaret waits, holding open the door.

Delicately, cradling her head, Edward puts Lucy into the oven without waking her. But as he lifts the door, one of the metal hinges CREAKS.

Lucy jolts awake with a SCREAM. Kicks open the door before Edward can shut it. With animal terror she thrashes her way out onto the linoleum floor. Margaret throws a piece of duct tape over her mouth, silencing her screams as Edward wrestles her back into the oven. But she kicks open the door again and the frantic struggle continues as...

EXT. SHERIDAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Emily's car lurches to a stop out front. As she jumps out, Barron's pickup arrives. He joins her, a reluctant accomplice.

BARRON

What are we doing here?

EMILY

Saving her life!

She goes up the walkway. Barron lagging a few steps behind, eyeing the darkened house.

BARRON

They're asleep.

EMILY

They're not asleep.

Emily hears something inside the house.

EMILY

Did you hear that?

BARRON

I didn't hear anything.

Emily, trusting her gut, starts pounding on the door.

EMILY

Leave her alone!

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Hearing Emily, Edward and Margaret intensify their efforts, jamming Lucy's legs inside the oven. The duct tape peels off her mouth in the struggle and before the oven door slams shut she belts out one last desperate SCREAM.

EXT. SHERIDAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Clearly audible outside, it makes Barron jump.

EMILY
Did you hear that?!

Barron pounds his big fist on the door.

BARRON
Police, open up!

EMILY
Break it down!

Barron rams his shoulder against the door, but it holds solid.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

We see Lucy's screaming face through the oven window as Margaret cranks the temperature dial as high as it will go.

INT. GAS OVEN - NIGHT

From inside we see Edward and Margaret peering in as Lucy claws at the glass with her fingernails. Coughing as the gas fills the oven with a low hiss. We hear it ignite beneath her with a faint poof. The first shimmering waves of heat rising up, singeing her hair.

EXT. SHERIDAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Emily, hysterical, knowing they're too late:

EMILY
BREAK IT DOWN!

INT. DOWNSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

The front door comes crashing down, kicked off its hinges by Barron. Emily and he race in.

EMILY
LUCY?!

They take off toward the kitchen at the end of the hall.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Emily and Barron rush in. Emily sees Lucy trapped inside the oven. The sleeve of her pajamas catching fire.

EMILY

Oh my God...

Edward tries to fend Barron off. It's a mistake. Barron unleashes a devastating blow that sends him recoiling into the fridge so hard the back of his head leaves a visible dent in the door.

Emily shoves Margaret aside and throws open the oven. Pulls Lucy out onto the kitchen floor, swatting out her burning pajamas with a dish towel.

Margaret grabs a steak knife and rushes at Emily, but Barron has her covered. Backhands Margaret so hard it spins her around fully before dropping her to the floor.

BARRON

The hell's the matter with you people?!

Pajamas scorched, wild with terror, Lucy cries in great heaving sobs in Emily's arms. Reduced to tears herself, Emily keeps saying the same thing over and over.

EMILY

I gotcha... I gotcha... I gotcha...

Shielding her from the sight of her parents: Margaret sprawled on the linoleum weeping. Edward slouched against the fridge, blood pouring down his shirt, his broken jaw hanging open like a man thinking wow.

INT. COUNTY COURTROOM - DAY

Edward and Margaret holding hands at the defendant's table, remorseless and defiant in their Sunday best. Among the many spectators we find Emily and Mike Barron. The STATE PROSECUTOR and PUBLIC DEFENDER addressing the JUDGE.

STATE PROSECUTOR

Prosecution asks that you disallow an insanity defense. This was an act committed with premeditation, malice aforethought -

PUBLIC DEFENDER

Your honor, the egregiousness of the crime makes the competency question all the more relevant.

JUDGE

Yes. I hereby order the defendants undergo psychiatric evaluation to determine their mental fitness for trial.

Emily rolls her eyes at Barron, some justice system.

EXT. COURTHOUSE PARKING LOT - DAY

Barron walks Emily to her car. She's outraged.

EMILY

Steal a pizza, San Quentin, try killing
your kid, Freudian dream analysis.

BARRON

Well, you're gonna hate me for saying
this, but my money's on crazy.

EMILY

Did they or did they not know what they
were doing? That's the legal standard.
They knew, they knew damn well!

BARRON

It's not that simple sometimes.

EMILY

(stops on a dime)
Meaning what exactly?

Barron hesitates. He's crossing the line by telling her
this.

BARRON

When we brought them in that night they
told Captain Lister... They think she's
evil, some kind of demon spirit, minion
of the devil or something.

EMILY

(laughs)
Oh, that's great - what is this, late-
night cable?

BARRON

No, but that might be the world they're
living in.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - DAY

Lucy in a hospital bed, dressings on her hand. Emily's
friend Doug sitting bedside. Child psychologist.

DOUG

-- and what's the most important thing we
talked about that you have to remember?

LUCY
It's not my fault what happened.

DOUG
That's right and you know what? It's not.

Lucy nods, not entirely convinced. Doug gives her a pat, crosses to the exit. At the door he runs into Emily. Shakes his head, awed at what she did.

DOUG
That is some seriously proactive social work happenin' there. You all right?

EMILY
Yeah, I'm okay. How's she doing?

DOUG
Typical reaction, blames herself. We'll get there. I'm gonna put her in a group setting, see if I can get her to open up.

EMILY
Group therapy for kids, what's that say about the world?

He nods - no kidding, heads off. Emily comes over and sits on Lucy's bed. Strokes her hair.

EMILY
Good news. You get to leave here tomorrow.

LUCY
Doug said I might have to go to a state home.

EMILY
Only for a few days, till we find a better place.

LUCY
Why can't I live with you?

EMILY
Oh, sweetheart. That would never be allowed.

LUCY
Why?

EMILY
It's complicated, there's a whole
process, I'm not even a foster parent...

Lucy gives a sad nod. Emily touches her arm.

EMILY
I'm sorry.

EXT. STATE CHILDREN'S HOME - DAY

No frills, purely functional housing. Emily comes up the steps with Lucy and knocks. The COORDINATOR answers. A kind but beleaguered-looking woman of fifty, who is surprised to see them.

COORDINATOR
They were supposed to call you. We don't
have any rooms.

EMILY
Nothing?

COORDINATOR
There was a mixup with the dates. Sorry.

Emily rolls her eyes. Lucy standing there holding a suitcase.

INT. EMILY'S CAR - DAY

Through the windshield Lucy watches Emily on a pay phone outside a convenience store. Her back is to us but you can see she's arguing with someone, scratching addresses off a typed list with a ballpoint.

TIME CUT TO:

Emily gets in and starts the car, putting on a smile.

EMILY
Hey, are you hungry? Let's get some
lunch. What kind of food do you like?

LUCY
There's nowhere for me to go is there?

Heartbreaking. Emily can't lie. She turns off the engine and leans back with a sigh. Lucy's silence is a plea for rescue.

EMILY

I can't, Lucy, it wouldn't work, I live in this tiny house, I... I'm sorry, I'm not mom material...

LUCY

You don't have to be my mom. Just my friend.

A ten-year-old girl stranded at a convenience store, suitcase in her lap. Emily stares out the windshield, wrestling with her conscience.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

At a round table, Emily addresses the CHILD WELFARE PANEL, six grave-faced administrators. Wayne is here, offering support.

EMILY

I know what it feels like to be that age and be unwanted. It's terrifying. She needs to be with someone she trusts; she trusts me. So much of our time is spent negotiating red tape, I think if we just look at the situation - this one situation, this one child - it's clear what's best for her.

The head of the panel is a bloated bureaucrat in a polka dot blouse (NANCY).

NANCY

This is highly irregular and I'll tell you right now it makes me very uncomfortable. But since, Wayne, you've spoken so persuasively on Miss Jennings's behalf...

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Emily comes out and nods yes to Lucy who waits with a guardian. As they hug:

NANCY (V.O.)

...I'm going to go against my better judgement and approve this petition for temporary custody.

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE - DAY

Emily walks Lucy through the house, showing her around, tidying things self-consciously.

EMILY
I like to think of it as a glass-half-
full situation. Kitchen. Bathroom.
Fish. And here, is your room...

INT. LUCY'S BEDROOM - DAY

They stop in the doorway. A small office in which Emily has made space for a bureau and a bed. Professional books and backup case files pushed aside on a shelf.

EMILY
Be okay?

Lucy nods yes.

LUCY
Where's your family?

EMILY
My family... well, I've met my dad twice
and my mom's not a part of my life
anymore.

LUCY
Why?

EMILY
(choosing her words)
Sometimes people have kids and then
decide they don't want to be parents.

Beneath the measured tone Emily's pain is revealed, raw and untouchable, her entire life a rebellion against it. She opens Lucy's suitcase on the bed. Pauses, remembering something.

EMILY
I'm glad you're here.

Lucy comes over to help unpack the clothes.

TIME CUT TO:

Lucy in bed, sipping a cup of tea as Emily brushes her hair.

LUCY
What's this?

EMILY
Chamomile, when I get stressed out it
helps me sleep.

Lucy nods that it's good. Emily brushes her hair. A natural bond between them.

EMILY

None of this ever should have happened,
if I could make it go away I would.

LUCY

You did.

Nice moment for Emily. A rare triumph. She tucks Lucy in. Turns off the bedside light.

EMILY

I'm right down the hall if you need me.

Lucy settles. Emily pauses at the door, looks back at the lost child she's taken in, then closes the door halfway.

EXT. SHERIDAN HOUSE - DAY

Dark, abandoned. Emily's Volvo pulls up.

INT. EMILY'S CAR - DAY

She eyes the house. It haunts her, the memory of what happened.

A SUDDEN KNOCK on the window makes her jump out of her seat. The guy there gestures a friendly sorry, didn't mean to scare you. White shirt and tie. A COURT CLERK.

EXT. SHERIDAN HOUSE - DAY

Emily signs a form as he unlocks the door, letting her in.

EMILY

I have to grab some of her things, might
take me a minute.

COURT CLERK

I trust ya, Em, make sure you lock it on
the way out.

INT. SHERIDAN HOUSE - DAY

Emily closes the door, glances around the dark interior. Through a window she sees the Court Clerk drive off. She's alone. It's quiet, eerily still.

She goes up the stairway. Slows, noticing something on the wall -

A FAINT SQUARE where a picture once was hung, the wallpaper a half tone darker underneath. More SQUARES farther up. A few nails still sticking out.

INT. LUCY'S BEDROOM, SHERIDAN HOUSE - DAY

Tattered lace curtains sway in a draft beside a bed with a moth-eaten coverlet. Emily packs Lucy's spare clothes into a dufflebag. Zips it and walks out.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Exiting Lucy's room, she notes the door to Edward and Margaret's bedroom, at the far end of the hall, is slightly AJAR. Succumbs to a natural curiosity.

INT. EDWARD AND MARGARET'S BEDROOM - DAY

The door pushes open, Emily peering in. A sad little master bedroom with old floral printed wallpaper and water stains on the ceiling.

She explores the room, inspecting various personal items - aftershave, glasses, hair brush - looking for clues to their madness.

An ALARM CLOCK with a cracked crystal face. She picks it up and it GOES OFF in her hand. Gives her a scare. She puts it down. Sees something out the bedroom window. Steps closer. Parts the curtains.

In the backyard, by the garden shed, a long rectangular hole has been dug. A SHALLOW GRAVE filling with leaves. Edward's handiwork. Emily's seen enough, heads for the door.

But slows, noticing something odd as she comes back around the bed -

A LONG DEEP SCRATCH

in the wooden floor, hidden under a long runner rug. Emily peels back the rug and finds -

HUNDREDS OF LONG DEEP SCRATCHES

in the floorboards leading toward the door. Something - the old oak bureau perhaps? - has been dragged repeatedly across the room.

Emily comes over and looks behind the door and sees, on the back of it, something even more bizarre -

TWO MASSIVE DEADBOLTS

screwed hastily, crookedly, into the wood. She closes the door. Slides-to the big heavy bolts -

CLUNK.

CLUNK.

Pauses. Looks again at the bureau. Slides it in front of the door, a wheelless caster bracket leaving another long scratch in the hardwood. And it's clear at this point what the deadbolts and bureau add up to -

A BARRICADE

Emily stares at it. Looks over at Edward and Margaret's bed, imagining them here behind this door. Slides the bureau aside. Opens the deadbolts. And as the door swings open she is looking straight down the hall at

LUCY'S BEDROOM

Emily stares, bewildered.

INT. GROUP THERAPY ROOM - DAY

ABUSED CHILDREN aged eight to thirteen sit in a circle of folding chairs. Lucy among them. Diego. Doug facilitating.

DOUG

Sometimes when our parents aren't getting along it's better if they don't see each other for a while, that's what a 'restraining order' does...

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE GROUP THERAPY - DAY

Emily looks in, waiting with other parents. Lucy sees her in the window and sneaks her a little wave. Emily smiles and holds up a hand that says, hi, hon. It's clear from these gestures how close they've gotten.

TIME CUT TO:

Emily and Doug walk together after session. Lucy talking to other kids her age by the elevator.

DOUG

She's starting to come out of her shell. It's good, I just wish I thought it was me making the difference.

Emily accepts the compliment.

EMILY

I went by the house. I think her mom and dad were barricading themselves in their room at night. How sick is that?

DOUG

Hatred and fear are part of the same pathology - oh, but I forgot, you don't think they're crazy.

EMILY

I'm coming around.

As they part ways...

INT. EMILY'S CAR - DAY

Emily pulls up in front of Lucy's school. Big moment for Lucy. New clothes. New haircut. New life.

EMILY

Okay?

Lucy nods, apprehensive, but she's ready to face it. Emily hugs her.

EMILY

This is your new beginning.

Lucy gets out. Pauses on the sidewalk.

LUCY

I love you, Emily.

Emily, touched, smiles.

EMILY

I love you, too.

Lucy goes up the walk. Emily watches her safely into the building.

INT. CHILD SERVICES DEPARTMENT - DAY

Emily draws grim looks as she crosses the common area. A pall hanging over the entire department. The first person she walks past says:

COWORKER

Wayne's looking for you.

The second person:

COWORKER #2

Wayne wants to --

EMILY

Got it.

She comes past Wayne's office. Empty. A coworker points over toward Emily's cubicle - he's there. She goes over. Wayne's inside, grave-faced, looking for a file. He finds it on the shelf. A photo of eight-year-old DIEGO clipped inside the cover. The boy we met earlier.

EMILY

What's up with Diego?

Wayne hesitates, wanting to spare her the bad news.

WAYNE

Why don't we talk in my office.

EMILY

Tell me what's going on.

WAYNE

We don't know why yet, but... he killed his mother and father last night.

Emily stands there, jaw on the floor.

EXT. MARTINEZ HOUSE - DAY

A police perimeter around a small house in a tough low-income neighborhood. Cops and crime scene investigators on the scene. Local news media broadcasting live. A couple of news choppers hovering overhead.

Emily pulls up, jumps out of her car. Mike Barron waves off the uniformed officer who moves to intercept her as she comes up the walkway to the house.

EMILY

What happened?

BARRON

Sure you want to see this?

With an uncertain nod she follows him inside.

INT. MARTINEZ HOUSE - DAY

Emily and Mike Barron come along the uncarpeted hallway.

BARRON

Gets a tire iron from the garage, comes back inside, locks all the doors and windows, kills them in their sleep...

The master bedroom. A bloodbath.

BARRON

Had to use dental records to identify the bodies.

Emily looks around, aghast.

EMILY

An eight-year-old did this? There's no way.

BARRON

I was there when they brought him in. Took three guys my size to subdue him. Kid was climbing the walls.

Barron turns to the window and - WHAM! - AN ATTACK DOG HITS THE GLASS RIGHT IN FRONT OF HIS FACE. Barron recoils with a yelp. Then, embarrassed, eyes the TRIO OF BATTLE-SCARRED PIT BULLS prowling the chainlink-fenced backyard.

BARRON

Just your average American family.

EXT. MARTINEZ HOUSE - DAY

Emily and Barron come down the steps.

EMILY

Where is he now?

BARRON

Juvie lockup. And, no, I'm not taking you to see him.

EMILY

You want to know what happened?

BARRON

I know what happened.

EMILY

I don't. I need to talk to him. Mike, please, I care about this kid.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - DAY

Diego Martinez sitting alone in a holding cell. Confused. Scared. He sees Emily approaching and immediately breaks down.

EMILY

Diego...

Emily tells the cop at the cell door:

EMILY

Let me in. He won't hurt me.

The cop looks at Mike Barron who nods it's okay. The cop opens the cell. Emily enters. Diego looks up at her, shuddering with emotion:

DIEGO

Are they dead?

Emily, gutted, nods yes. Diego buries his face in Emily's stomach and sobs.

EMILY

What happened? Tell me what happened.

DIEGO

(sobbing)

I killed my mum and dad...

Emily, devastated, trades looks with Barron through the bars.

EXT. VENICE PIER - DAY

Doug tenderly consoles Emily. Has his arms around her. They're leaning against the railing, wind on their faces.

DOUG

Every family you sit down with every day
of every week is a family in crisis.
Those are your odds. That's the job you
do. Trying to beat them.

Wipes away her tears. The hair from her face.

DOUG

You're one person, Em. You can't save
the world.

(then)

I know somebody you did save.

Lucy on the beach below, walking barefoot at water's edge, hem of her dress in her hands. Emily watches her and, finding solace in it, leans into Doug's embrace and closes her eyes.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

The plaintive cries of seagulls overhead as Emily and Lucy walk along the surf at sundown, Emily barefoot now as well.

LUCY

You okay?

Emily nods, putting on a brave face to spare Lucy.

EMILY

It's just work. Don't worry.

Lucy nods okay. They walk on in silence for a moment.

LUCY

Why do you do it if it makes you sad?

EMILY

My job? I don't know, I guess... I guess maybe I want to believe families can work, so I can have my own someday, I don't know - does that make sense?

Lucy nods, takes her hand. They walk off up the beach together.

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE - DAY

Emily, days later, dressed for work, halves an omelet with a spatula and slides the halves onto two plates.

EMILY

(calls to other room)
Breakfast.

There's no answer. Emily goes to get her.

INT. LUCY'S ROOM - DAY

Stops in the doorway.

EMILY

Honey, breakfa--

Sees Lucy hide something under her pillow. Emily comes over, brow arched, playful.

EMILY
Come on, let me see...

Lucy guiltily eyes the floor. Emily lifts the pillow.
Underneath it is a photograph.

EMILY, AS A YOUNG GIRL, WITH HER MOTHER.

She looks at Lucy, then at the filing cabinet from which it
was taken. More surprised than upset.

EMILY
You went through my things?

LUCY
I'm sorry... I wanted to know what
happened to you.

Disarming sincerity. Emily's gaze falls to the photo. Quiet
moment. She sits down on the bed with it.

LUCY
Is that your mom?

Emily nods, lost in the image. It's a photo that captures
her entire childhood. Emily and her mother sitting on the
steps of a house, together but apart, like a lost child that
sat down next to a pretty stranger who hasn't yet noticed
her. Emily's ten-year-old face shows the quiet sadness of
the disconnect. Reminds you of a child from her caseload.

EMILY
She used to just leave, she'd just...
(gestures 'adios')
...and I never knew when she was coming
back, or if she was... I used to think it
was my fault and I would try so hard when
she got home to be good, do everything I
could think of, so she'd think I was
'special' and stay next time or take me
with her, but... it didn't matter, she'd
always go away again, that's how it was.

Emily fights her emotions and, practiced at the task, wins.
Lucy sits beside her on the bed. Understands her deeply.
Linked by their pasts.

LUCY
Where was your dad?

EMILY
Gone, he left before I was born. First
time I met him I was like thirteen.

LUCY

What'd you say to him?

EMILY

Oh, I had all these things I was gonna say. Angry things I'd thought of and kind of memorized. And um.... And then I met him and I wasn't angry, I was just sad and I told him...

(pauses, raw emotion)

I said, I love you, even if you don't love me.

Emily smiles a pained smile and then buries the memory.
Lucy, a portrait of contrition:

LUCY

Are you mad at me?

EMILY

No... No, I'm not mad at you.

(puts her arm around her)

But I need you not to do that again, okay? Go through my private things without asking?

Lucy nods okay. Emily moves on, with a loving touch:

EMILY

Omelet's getting cold. Better hurry.

Lucy exits. Emily eyes the photo a moment longer then stands and puts it away in the filing cabinet. She pauses, feeling exposed, and turns the little key to lock the drawers.

INT. EMILY'S CUBICLE - DAY

Emily stops at her cubicle, registering a surprise. Wayne handing her case files to three COWORKERS. Awkward moment for everyone.

WAYNE

(sympathetic)

I need another set of eyes to go over them, make sure we haven't missed anything else.

EMILY

You mean, to make sure I haven't missed anything else?

WAYNE

It's just a legal thing. You'll have them back tomorrow.

They exit. She goes in and stares at the BARE SHELF above her desk. Her caseload gone. More than an insult. Everything she cares about.

A pink phone message on her keyboard. She picks it up: Mike Barron called. Important.

INT. COFFEE HOUSE - DAY

Newspaper headline: "INSANITY DEFENSE FOR GLENDALE COUPLE". MUGSHOTS of Edward and Margaret below. The morning edition folded on a table between Barron and Emily. They're drinking coffee.

BARRON

You watch, six months, their lawyer will hire some expert to say they're rehabbed and they'll sue for custody when they get out.

EMILY

She's not going back there, I'll take her out of state before I let them near her again.

BARRON

I didn't hear you say that.

Emily knows she's misspoken, but lets it stand.

EMILY

You wanted to talk about something?

Barron nods, sips his coffee, a bit uncomfortable.

BARRON

We pulled the Martinezes' phone records. They got a call that night before the murders.

EMILY

From who?

BARRON

(sober pause)
Emily, the call came from your house.

EMILY

What...?

BARRON

Look, I'm not accusing you of anything, I just need to know what was said.

EMILY

That's impossible. I might have called the week before...?

BARRON

I'm talking to you as a friend here, you know that, right?

EMILY

Did you not hear me? I'm telling you, Mike, as a friend, I did not call that family.

BARRON

Then who did? Go find the guy who broke in and just happened to dial the number of a kid whose case you handle.

Emily starts to say something, but stops as a confounding realization comes to her. And then to Barron.

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE - DAY

Lucy sits on the sofa studying a photo of Diego. Emily sits beside her, her advocate. Barron opposite.

LUCY

He's in my group...
(puts down photo)
...why, did something happen?

Emily nods yes. Barron, gently, mindful of Lucy's age:

BARRON

We're trying to figure out why. He got a call Thursday night from this number. I'm just wondering if he might have said anything...

LUCY

It wasn't me.

BARRON

You didn't call him?

Lucy shakes her head. Barron nods okay, then, speaking to her as a father might his own daughter:

BARRON

Lucy, it's hard sometimes to tell the truth, but I know you will because you're a good little girl.

LUCY

I am telling the truth.

EMILY

My backup files are in your room. Diego's is in there. Maybe you got curious and went through some, dialed a number?

LUCY

It wasn't me, I swear.

Complete innocence. Emily nods okay, wanting to believe, but remembering the stolen photograph.

BARRON

The call was at 2 am, are you ever up that late?

LUCY

I didn't call him.

BARRON

Are you ever up that late?

EMILY

Mike, she said no. Maybe someone made a mistake.

Barron reads Emily's posture and disengages, stands to go.

BARRON

Yeah, maybe so. Night, Lucy.

INT. FRONT DOOR, EMILY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Exiting, Barron tells Emily as gently as possible:

BARRON

She's lying.

And goes down the steps. Emily closes the door. Turns around and there's Lucy. Uncomfortably close.

LUCY

Do you believe me?

EMILY
I believe you.

Lucy hugs her and Emily hugs her back, but she's still thinking about what Barron said.

INT. EMILY'S CUBICLE - DAY

A PHOTO of Emily and Diego tacked to the corkboard panel beside her desk. Emily sits contemplating it. Her gaze goes from the photo to the BARE SHELF above her desk. Her caseload is still missing. This is bullshit.

INT. WAYNE'S OFFICE - DAY

Emily walks in, power pose.

EMILY
Give me back my cases or fire me. Right now.

Wayne, caught unprepared, eating a doughnut.

INT. EMILY'S OFFICE - DAY

Caseload restored, Emily is multi-tasking, opening mail, sorting backlogged paperwork, talking on the phone:

EMILY
I don't care if it's a hairline fracture, he broke her arm, I don't want him back in that house. He what? He found Christ? When? That recently? Uh huh. Well he should have found Him sooner.

Hangs up. Doug leans in the doorway, drops a manila envelope in her in-box. And a computer printout.

EMILY
What's up?

DOUG
Copy of the Sheridans' psych evals for the file. And the cognitive profile Lucy did for me the other day.

EMILY
(re: Lucy's profile)
How's it look?

DOUG WINTERS
Normal.

But his tone suggests otherwise.

EMILY

Do I have to beg or are you gonna tell me what's going on?

DOUG

You have to beg.

(same breath)

Coming from an environment like that, testing this normal is a bit abnormal, if that makes any sense.

EMILY

She's 'abnormally normal'?

DOUG

I think she faked it, gave the answers she thought she should.

EMILY

Why would she do that?

DOUG

(shrugs)

She's ashamed of who she is. Ashamed of how she feels. Afraid nobody would want her if they saw the real her.

(off Emily's reaction)

It's no big deal, it just means I might have to push her a little.

EMILY

No, I know, I just... The Martinezes' got a call Thursday night. From my house.

DOUG

Did you ask her about it?

EMILY

She said she didn't. Mike thinks she's lying.

DOUG

What do you think?

EMILY

I don't know what to think.

DOUG

Hmm. Bring her in after work, I'll do a one-on-one. I wanted to talk to her about this anyway.

He departs. Emily, alone in her cubicle, scans the test results with growing concern.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CELL - DAY

Diego eating macaroni and cheese from a jailhouse tray. Emily sets a folded blanket on the bed as she sits down to talk to him.

EMILY

Got you an extra in case it gets cold.

Diego nods without looking up.

EMILY

I need to ask you something... about the night it happened... did you get a call, really late?

Diego stops eating. Stares at his food. Shakes his head no - warily, like someone might be listening.

EMILY

You didn't?

He shakes his head no. Still staring at his food.

EMILY

Diego, I know you did, they called from my house.

Diego puts down his fork, his fear obvious now, his breathing quick and shallow.

EMILY

What's the matter? What's scaring you?

He looks at Emily, terrified, starts HYPERVENTILATING.

EMILY

Oh God...

Emily tries to calm the panicked boy as he gasps for air, a horrible WHEEZING sound in his throat.

EMILY

It's okay... slow breaths... you'll be okay...

(yelling down hall)

Can somebody help us down here?!

INT. INFIRMARY, JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - DAY

A little two-bed infirmary with unpainted cinder block walls. Diego in bed on an IV drip. Emily talking to a NURSE by the check-in desk.

NURSE

He asked to see you before you left.

Emily comes over to Diego's bed. He holds her gaze in silence, a secret he's afraid to tell. Emily speaks at a whisper, as if to make the truth less frightening:

EMILY

Who called you? Was it Lucy?

Diego's PULSE ACCELERATES on the EKG monitor. He gives a trembling nod.

EMILY

Did she say something to you? Something that scared you?

Diego replies in Spanish, barely discernible, his throat raw:

DIEGO

El dijo...

EMILY

'El' dijo? What do you mean, 'He said'?

Diego looks at her, confused, terrified. His RACING PULSE a jagged green line above the bed.

DIEGO

Era un hombre.

A chill goes through Emily.

EMILY

It was a man?

Diego gives another trembling nod. Emily beside him, baffled and a bit scared.

INT. CHILD SERVICES - NIGHT

After hours, the office is empty, half lit and eerily still. Emily is photocopying at a work station, haunted by what Diego said, the harsh upward light accentuating her tense features.

The CYCLICAL SQUEAKING NOISE we hear is Lucy, in Emily's cubicle in the b.g., turning herself in circles on the office chair. Something very creepy about the disappearance and reappearance of that pale watchful face.

Finished, Emily walks back to her cubicle, thrown by the sight of Lucy spinning in the chair, walking head-on into that eerie intermittent gaze.

LUCY

Do...
 (turns)
 you...
 (turns)
 like...
 (turns)
 working...
 (turns)
 here?

Emily, unnerved, enters the cubicle.

EMILY

Well, photocopying isn't much fun.

Lucy stops turning, stares at her, sensing something.

EMILY

What...?

Lucy just stares. Doug appears in the doorway.

DOUG

Knock, knock. Sorry I'm late, guys.
 (to Lucy)
 Ready, kiddo?

Lucy nods and gets up from the chair.

DOUG

Go ahead down, I'll be right there.

Lucy heads down the hall to the conference room.

DOUG

 (to Emily)
 You all right?

EMILY

This is weird. Diego said it was Lucy that called, but he called her a he, he said it was a man.

His face - what? Emily nods yes. Doug's brow arches then furrows. He turns and heads down the hall.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Doug sits opposite Lucy at the table, keeps it easygoing despite what he's just been told.

DOUG
So how's school?

LUCY
Fine.

DOUG
Any of your classmates giving you a hard time?

LUCY
No, they've been nice.

DOUG
Sleeping okay?

LUCY
That's not really what you want to talk about, is it, Doug?

Awkward pause. Awkward smile.

DOUG
You got me.

Opens his file. Takes out her cognitive assessment profile. Lays it flat on the table.

DOUG
Question 16a, are you afraid of the dark? You answered 'no'. Question 16b, are you afraid of being alone? 'No'. 16c, are you afraid of your parents? 'No'. You answered 'no' to everything in that section. I think some of those should have been yesses. Everybody is afraid of something. Working through our fears, conquering them, is how we get better. So I want you to tell me... What scares you?

Lucy steeples her fingers and rests her chin on top, regards Doug with a look of frank appraisal. It is the face of a child, but behind those eyes there is a keen intelligence.

LUCY

I'll tell you what scares me if you tell me what scares you.

Doug did not see this coming.

DOUG

Fair enough. When I was twelve I was climbing a tree and I accidentally put my hand through a giant hornets' nest. They didn't like it. I got stung over a hundred times. They had to rush me to the hospital. I've been afraid of hornets ever since. Don't climb many trees either.

(smiles)

Everybody has fears. Now, what scares you?

LUCY

Me.

Pause.

DOUG

You scare yourself?

LUCY

Sometimes.

DOUG

Why, what about yourself scares you?

LUCY

I have bad thoughts.

DOUG

About what?

LUCY

People.

DOUG

People in general or certain people?

LUCY

Certain people.

DOUG

Like who?

LUCY

You.

Silence.

DOUG
You have bad thoughts about me?
(she nods)
Why?

LUCY
(shrugs)
I just do.

DOUG
Was there something I said or did that
upset you?

LUCY
(shakes her head)
It's just the way you are...

DOUG
How am I?

LUCY
Facile.

DOUG
Facile?
(she nods yes)
Do you even know what that means?

LUCY
Easily comprehended. Often lacking
sincerity or depth. You're smug, too.
Want me to tell you what that means?

Dead silence. Doug skewered by a ten-year-old. A boyish
shyness emerges, a relic from his own youth.

DOUG
Well, if, um, if I seemed 'smug' or
'facile' I want to -

LUCY
(girlish laugh)
Don't apologize.

DOUG
Why?

LUCY
You're a grown up, it's embarrassing.
(then; deadpan)
(MORE)

LUCY (CONT'D)
Should we talk about school now? My
grades are getting a lot better.

Doug just stares at her.

INT. HALLWAY, CHILD SERVICES DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

Waiting until Lucy is out of earshot down the hall, Doug confers with Emily by the water cooler. He's sweating, shaken by the encounter.

DOUG
Talked to a lot of ten-year-olds, I don't
think I've ever felt like that before...

EMILY
Like what?

DOUG
Threatened.
(then; baffled)
I know a specialist, I'll call him in the
morning.

EMILY
What do I do with her in the meantime?

Doug pauses, no idea, smiles an eerie smile.

DOUG
Don't let her get in your head.

Exits. His paranoia feeding Emily's. In the hush she hears that faint CYCLICAL SQUEAKING. Looks across the darkened office to her cubicle where Lucy is turning circles in her chair again.

That face. That face. That face.

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tense dinner. Emily barely touching hers. Lucy, absently, but with an almost surgical precision, is CUTTING PEAS IN HALF ON HER PLATE AND EATING THEM ONE BY ONE OFF THE TIP OF THE KNIFE. Weird. She stops, self-conscious, looks at Emily across the table.

LUCY
Are you mad at me?

EMILY
No. Just tired.

LUCY
Want me to brush your hair?

EMILY
That's okay.

LUCY
Are you sure?

EMILY
Some other time.

LUCY
(stands up)
It will make you feel better. I'll get
the brush.

EMILY
I said no, thank you.

Lucy stares at Emily for a moment then sits again. And it's strange, her posture seems subtly different, stiffer, bonier, as if all her muscles have drawn taut under her clothes. In a voice at once innocent and menacing:

LUCY
Doug said something, didn't he?

EMILY
No. Doug? He says you're doing great.

Tense silence.

LUCY
What did he tell you?

EMILY
Nothing.

Lucy stares at her, seeing through the facade. Then, oddly bright, taking a bite of food:

LUCY
You're funny.

INT. LUCY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

EMILY SILHOUETTED in the doorway, keeping her distance as she says goodnight:

EMILY
Get some rest.

She starts to close the door.

LUCY
You forgot to kiss me goodnight.

A tense pause then Emily walks over and kisses her on the forehead.

EMILY
Goodnight.

Lucy clutches her wrist as she turns to go.

LUCY
I love you.

Emily, trapped, forces a tender smile.

EMILY
I love you, too.

Lucy's EYES GLEAM in the darkness. She turns onto her side for sleep, but those eyes don't shut even after Emily has walked out and closed the door behind her.

INT. DOUG'S CONDO - NIGHT

Football highlights on a liquid plasma tv. Doug flipping through a DSM IV diagnostic manual. The phone RINGS. He picks up, distracted, scanning the DSM index.

DOUG
Hello?

A strange INTERMITTENT STATIC BUZZ on the line.

DOUG
Hello...?

BZZZZT. BZZZZT. BZZZZT. A telecommunications glitch.

DOUG
Try again, sorry.

He hangs up. Finds the chapter he's looking for. ANTI-SOCIAL PERSONALITY TYPE. But he hears it again now -

BZZZZZZZZT BZZZZZZZZT - louder, deeper - and realizes, in quiet terror, that it's coming from INSIDE HIS EAR.

INT. DOUG'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Doug opens the medicine cabinet and grabs a Q-tip. Wiggles it around in his ear and when he takes it out there's a

HORNET

sitting on the cottony tip, scissoring its wings.

Doug stares in disbelief. Mouth gaping.

He throws the Q-tip in the toilet. Hits the flush lever. Watches the hornet spiral away. Gone.

Stares at the empty bowl. Did I just imagine that?

Shaken, he turns to the sink. Wedges his head under the tap and runs water into his ear.

Straightens and looks at himself in the mirror, toweling his face, trying to impose rational thought on the situation. But as the water spills from his ear, down his neck, onto his shirt, it brings with it -

TWO MORE LIVE HORNETS, half drowned.

With a yelp Doug swipes them from his shirt. Crushes them underfoot. Terrified, but clinging to rational thought a moment longer, he turns his head sideways to the mirror, parts his hair, and sees -

ANOTHER HORNET crawl from the ear canal, followed by SIX OR SEVEN MORE!

DOUG

FUCK!

Rationality goes out the window. He flails at them with the towel. Swats them dead. Picks them up and drops them in the toilet. Studies the last one for a moment. Its little legs twitching. Drops it in. Flushes.

A false respite. And a brief one. Because as the FLUSHING NOISE FADES he can hear an ominous DEEP BUZZING SOUND RISING.

It's coming from behind him. He turns to have a look. Nothing there. Bare wall.

But it's strange: the BUZZING IS STILL BEHIND HIM.

With dawning horror Doug turns and checks his back in the mirror, sees

HIS ENTIRE SHIRT BACK IS CRAWLING WITH HORNETS!

Whimpering like a child, he undoes the buttons of his shirt, taking it off as delicately as possible. Slipping his arms gently from the sleeves.

Holding it by the collar, he takes two quick steps and tosses it in the shower. Slams the glass door, seals the crack with towels. And watches the hornets fly around in the glass enclosure, BUZZING FURIOUSLY, bouncing off the glass.

But as he backpedals he realizes the FURIOUS BUZZING is too close, too loud and too deep, to be coming from the shower over there. A sharp pain in his head confirms it. He GROANS and brings a hand to his ear as something awful happens inside.

The BUZZING in his right ear spreads to his left - LOUDER, ANGRIER, its sources multiplying. Disoriented, he stumbles backwards with an AGONIZING SCREAM. Catches sight of himself in the mirror, the terror of the moment on his face. This can't be happening.

And now the nightmare takes a devilish turn. Looking at himself in the mirror, he sees -

HORNETS START CRAWLING FROM HIS NOSE. FROM BETWEEN HIS LIPS. FROM UNDER HIS EYELIDS. THE BUZZING NOW UNBEARABLY LOUD. AN ENTIRE SWARM RAGING INSIDE HIS SKULL, FIGHTING ITS WAY OUT!

Doug grabs his head in both hands and starts shaking it, trying to shake away the madness inside. But the hornets keep coming, COUGHED UP IN CLUMPS as he gasps for air. They're all over him, stinging his tongue, his eyes.

He goes berserk and starts SMASHING HIS HEAD against the wall, the door, the edge of the sink, anything he can find, opening a deep gash in his forehead, smashing it harder and harder because the BUZZING WON'T STOP, cracking his skull, SCREAMING HYSTERICALLY, pitching his head violently forwards and backwards like some demon-possessed heavy metal fanatic.

It's a grotesque display that ends on a sickening note when, with one particularly violent head jerk, he snaps his own neck - CRACK!!! He sinks to the floor, head askew, astonished look on his face.

And there he sits, paralyzed, eyes locked on the tv in the living room where football highlights play in silence. Fully conscious as the hornets fight their way back into his ears, nose, and mouth - a pilgrimage back to the mind that bore them.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE COUNSELING ROOM - DAY

Emily exits a counseling room. Says goodbye to a young family -

EMILY

See you next week.

- and comes down the hall toward the common area. A coworker stands from an adjacent cubicle. DENISE.

DENISE

Seen Doug? He had an appointment with one of my kids this morning, never showed up.

EMILY

Did you try calling him?

DENISE

All I get is voicemail.

Emily dials Doug on a fax/phone by the Xerox machine. On the first RING:

ANSWERING MACHINE

Hey, this is Doug, here it comes -

BEEP. She hangs up. A dark thought sends her toward the exit, calling back to Denise -

EMILY

Cover my desk.

EXT. DOUG'S CONDO - DAY

Emily knocking on the door of his Marina Del Rey townhouse.

EMILY

Doug, it's me, it's Emily...

No answer.

She comes down the steps to his car, walks past it and then stops, noticing the window is open a crack. Slipping her hand inside, stretching, she extends one finger just far enough to push the button on the garage door remote clipped to the sunvisor.

Up the drive, the door starts to open.

INT. DOUG'S CONDO - DAY

A door in the first-floor hallway opens. Emily steps in.

EMILY

Doug?

No answer. She comes up the stairs into the LIVING ROOM. The tv is still on. Muted. Calls up the next flight of stairs.

EMILY

Doug, you here?

No reply. She goes up the stairs and down the hall and checks the BEDROOM. Empty. The bed unmade. It's when she turns from the room to go back downstairs that she sees him:

SLOUCHED DEAD AGAINST THE BATHROOM WALL, GUT BLOATED BY DECOMPOSITION, FACE COVERED IN BLACKENED DAY-OLD BLOOD.

EMILY

NOOOOO!!!!!!

INT. COUNTY CORONER - DAY

With stoic grief Emily walks down the cold, fluorescently-lit corridor, intercepts a CORONER as he exits the exam room.

EMILY

Dr Johannsen?

He looks at her; pale, bespectacled, a bit standoffish.

EMILY

You did the autopsy on Doug Winters?

CORONER

(trying to remember)

Winters -- oh, right, Douglas.

EMILY

How did he die?

CORONER

Family?

EMILY

Friend.

(preempting his reply)

I know the rules -- please, he meant a lot to me.

Her face the proof. He indicates his adjoining office. They go in.

INT. CORONER'S OFFICE - DAY

He takes the autopsy report from a filing cabinet. Reviews his findings.

CORONER

Compression fracture of the third and forth vertebrae. Severed his spinal cord. Actual cause of death was... suffocation.

EMILY

You're saying he did that to himself?

CORONER

It appears all his injuries were self-inflicted, yes.

EMILY

Oh come on. He looked like he'd been beaten to death! Don't tell me he was some - some suicidal...

(breaking down)

...I knew him! He was my best friend!

She turns away crying.

CORONER

Miss, I would never presume to know your friend better than you. But the injuries suggest he was trying to hurt himself. Unfortunately, he succeeded. I am sorry.

Emily, composing herself, gives a quiet nod. She has no quarrel with this man.

EMILY

Have you ever seen this before, somebody dying like this?

The coroner files the report, world weary.

CORONER

Truly, I am shocked every day by the violence people do to themselves.

INT. CEMETERY - DAY

DOUGLAS J. WINTERS etched in granite. A final prayer read by a PRIEST as he is laid to rest.

A breeze ruffles the clothes of the MOURNERS. Blows hair across Emily's haunted face.

Lucy, at her side, sees her grief and reaches for her hand. Instinctively, Emily retracts it. Lucy registers the slight, the wider implications.

Emily watches the coffin descend. She weeps openly.

INT. EMILY'S CAR - DAY

Emily, red-eyed, driving home, sees something in her peripheral vision that sends a chill through her.

Lucy, gazing quietly out the passenger-side window, is SWINGING HER LEGS in that contented way children do. A small but telling detail. Immediately HER LEGS STOP SWINGING, sensing Emily's stare. And with her head still turned away:

LUCY

You think it's my fault, don't you?

She turns to face Emily, who measures her words.

EMILY

It was an accident. It was nobody's fault.

Lucy holds her gaze. Then, as if to test her, reaches again for Emily's hand. Trapped in the lie, Emily has to let her. And as she drives on in that private hell, holding hands with Lucy...

INT. MIKE BARRON'S OFFICE - DAY

Emily, an emotional wreck, confides in Barron.

EMILY

He was scared. He came out of that room with her, Mike, and he was scared. He said she threatened him.

BARRON

Listen. You're still in shock. Let's not --

EMILY

Diego said it was a man on the phone. You know who made that call. There was no one else in the house.

(off his look)

You think I don't know how crazy this sounds?!

BARRON

Look, I don't know, all I'm saying is a kid in his state of mind maybe isn't the most reliable witness.

EMILY

Why is he in that state of mind? Why was Doug? Pull my phone records. See if she called him.

BARRON

Emily. I already did. There were no calls from your house.

Emily's argument collapses. She sits there for a moment, vexed, her intellect telling her one thing, her gut another. She gets up to go. Pauses at the door.

EMILY

Her mother and father, their bedroom door has these deadbolts on it, big ones, two of 'em... Something came through that door and they didn't want it ever coming through there again.

INT. EMILY'S CUBICLE - DAY

Emily digs through her in-box, spilling things on the floor. Finds the manila envelope Doug gave her. Rips it open. Dumps the contents into her hand.

A VIDEO TAPE

Typed on the label: Sheridan, Marg. & Ed., Prelim. Psych Interviews.

CUT TO:

ON A TELEVISION - Margaret Sheridan sits facing the camera, responding to the questions of an unseen interviewer. Her haunted face and frank tone make the interview chilling.

INTERVIEWER

And by forcing your daughter into the oven, can you tell me, what did you think the outcome would be?

MARGARET

You mean what were we doing it for?

INTERVIEWER

Yes.

MARGARET
To kill her.

INTERVIEWER
Why?

MARGARET
God's will.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Pulling back, we see Emily alone in a dimmed conference room watching the tape.

INTERVIEWER
And why was it God's will that you should kill your daughter?

An eerie smile comes to Margaret's face.

INTERVIEWER
Why is that funny, Margaret?

MARGARET
'Cause she's not my daughter.

INTERVIEWER
You're her mother...?

MARGARET
I bore her, but she's not mine.

INTERVIEWER
Help me understand. If you and Edward are Lucy's biological parents, how can she not be yours?

MARGARET
'Cause she's not Of us.

INTERVIEWER
Not Of you?

Margaret nods.

INTERVIEWER
Who is she Of?

MARGARET
Not who, what.

INTERVIEWER
What is she Of?

MARGARET

Stop acting like you don't know what I'm talking about.

Stares at him. Her eyes black and unblinking.

INTERVIEWER

You think your daughter is the devil?

MARGARET

Not him himself, Of him, working in his name, in his honor.

INTERVIEWER

Evil incarnate?

MARGARET

I don't care what you call it.

INTERVIEWER

And why do you think that?

MARGARET

Not what I think it's what I know.

INTERVIEWER

How do you know this? Could you give me an example?

Margaret pauses. Seeming afraid for the first time. Some secrets perhaps best left untold.

MARGARET

She can make you see things. Visions.

INTERVIEWER

Visions of what?

MARGARET

Hell. Damnation. Whatever you're afraid of.

INTERVIEWER

I see. Any other 'special abilities'?

MARGARET

People die around her, is that a special ability?

INTERVIEWER

She kills people?

MARGARET

Not by her hand, they just die. I had
two brothers, Brent and Travis...

Margaret's voice falters. Overcome by grief, she dissolves
into tears. It's a side of her we've never seen. Human.

MARGARET

...and I mean they was healthy boys,
healthy as can be. Eddie, three sisters.
Soon as she was born they started dying.

INTERVIEWER

You blame Lucy for their deaths?

Margaret nods yes, wiping her eyes. Embarrassed.
Unaccustomed to crying in front of strangers.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you imagine you were spared?

MARGARET

I guess she couldn't get rid of us till
she found somebody else. Now that she
has, I don't imagine we're long for this
world.

CLOSE UP ON MARGARET - face streaked with tears, her pain
deep and undeniable.

CUT TO:

VIDEO OF EDWARD SHERIDAN in a violent rage. Pushing his
chair back from the interview table, he stands, screaming
through clenched teeth, his broken jaw wired shut:

EDWARD

THE HELL DID I JUST SAY?!

INTERVIEWER

Edward, please calm --

EDWARD

YOU AND YOUR GODDAMN QUESTIONS! YOU
DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT!

A pair of orderlies rush in to restrain him. The CAMERA gets
knocked ajar in the struggle. The tape ends as they take
Edward screaming to the floor.

EDWARD

IT'S NOT CHILD KILLING IF SHE'S NOT A
CHILD!

And that's the interview. Emily stares at the BLANK BLUE SCREEN, transfixed, lowers her gaze to the table.

There's a PHOTO tucked inside the psychiatric file. Edward and Margaret in happier times - YOUNG BIBLE CAMP COUNSELORS in T-shirts and hiking boots on a path through sunlit forest. Sweet. Innocent. Emily's age. The year they met perhaps.

She holds it up to the newspaper mugshots for a before-and-after comparison. The transformation of their faces is shocking. Emily sits frozen by the realization: Edward and Margaret Sheridan. Not criminals. Victims.

INT. STATE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - DAY

An old brick orphanage turned psychiatric hospital. Emily's Volvo goes up the winding tree-lined drive.

CHIEF PSYCHIATRIST (V.O.)
Unfortunately Mrs Sheridan suffered a
rather severe psychotic episode last
night...

INT. STATE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - DAY

Emily and the CHIEF PSYCHIATRIST walk down a dark, institutional corridor.

CHIEF PSYCHIATRIST
...Woke up screaming, absolutely
convinced she was on fire. She wasn't,
of course, they managed to sedate her.
But it's curious, she displays all the
symptoms of a burn patient. Except the
burns themselves...

Margaret's door. Emily peers through a little square of reinforced glass. A padded cell. Margaret strapped to a bed. Writhing in pain. Laboring to breathe. Eyes swimming.

CHIEF PSYCHIATRIST
In no condition for visitors as you can
see. If you'd like, I could let you see
Mr Sheridan?

Emily hesitates, afraid of him.

EMILY
Okay.

She casts a departing glance through the window and shudders to see that Margaret's roaming eyes have locked on her in a hollow stare.

INT. VISITATION ROOM, PSYCH HOSPITAL - DAY

Restrained in a straitjacket, Edward is brought in by two orderlies who seat him at a table opposite Emily and then exit. Jaw wired, everything he says is spoken through clenched teeth.

EMILY

I know I'm probably the last person you
want to see right now, but you're...

His stare unnerves her. She stops and collects herself.

EMILY

You're the only one I can talk to.
Lucy's been staying with me -

EDWARD

Who died?

Emily falls silent. Her voice cracks with emotion.

EMILY

A friend.

Edward nods yup. Regards her in silence. Emily speaks, or tries to, just to fill that awful void.

EMILY

I, ummm...

EDWARD

You're scared.

Emily, skewered again, nods yes.

EDWARD

You oughta be.

Dead silence. She meets his gaze. And there is eye contact, true understanding.

EDWARD

You judged us before you ever walked in
that house. Sat there in our living room
tellin' us about our problems, how to be
better parents - certain of everything
and dead wrong about all of it.

(then)

Ask what you came to ask.

After a moment:

EMILY

What is she?

It's a question Edward has asked himself once or twice. He leans back in his chair and folds his arms with an almost casual air.

EDWARD

Can tell you what she's not. She not a daughter of mine. She's not a ten-year-old having trouble in school. She's not some innocent victim whose door you busted down and life you saved. And she's not going no place, lady, till she's good and done with you.

EMILY

Done with me how?

EDWARD

However she wants. You think it's an accident her ending up with you? She saw you coming a mile away.

EMILY

Why me? I don't have anything.

EDWARD

You have that you're good. Kindness. Decency. That's what she feeds on. Bleeds ya dry, moves onto the next. We were a big family, she went through us like a wrecking ball. And you know, every time something happened, every time, we had an excuse for why it wasn't her fault. Cuz it's easier to lie to yourself than think bad things about your baby girl. But finally we got to a point where me and Maggy looked at each other -
(remembers so clearly)
- where we looked at each other and we was out of lies, both of us. Most terrifying moment of our lives. And that's where you are now.

Emily silently registering this truth.

EDWARD

I'll tell you this. She sees everything. And what she doesn't see she just sort of senses it, like when you call a friend and they pick up before it rings?

(MORE)

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Only time you got the upper hand is when she's sleepin' but she almost never does. We checked on her every night for three months. Every twenty minutes, up and down those stairs. First time she slept was the night you kicked in my front door.

After a moment:

EMILY

What does she want?

EDWARD

To know... what your idea of hell is... and make you live there.

Emily sits in haunted silence. Edward's features soften.

EDWARD

I'm not a hateful man. I look at you and I wish I could tell you you're through the worst of it. That it's gonna work out for you in the end. I wish I could.

EMILY

What should I do?

A pitying smile reveals Edward's wired teeth.

EDWARD

How strong's your faith?

INT. CORRIDOR, CHILD WELFARE - DAY

NANCY, the bloated director from the custody panel, walking briskly down a corridor. Emily calls to her from behind, approaching.

EMILY

Nancy...?

NANCY

Emily, I heard about Doug. I'm so sorry.

EMILY

(nods)

Do you have a minute?

Nancy glances at her watch, nods okay, a minute.

INT. CHILD WELFARE DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Emily and Nancy enter the lavish office.

NANCY

How's it working out with the Sheridan girl?

EMILY

Actually, that's why I'm here. I appreciate what you did for me, Nancy, I really do, but I think it'd be best if she was placed in foster care.

NANCY

She is. You're it.

EMILY

I know, but it's not working out.

NANCY

Playing mommy isn't the laugh-a-minute you were hoping, huh?

EMILY

I suppose not.

Nancy nods, not entirely surprised.

NANCY

Sorry, you petitioned for custody, you got it. She's your responsibility.

EMILY

Until when?

NANCY

Till we find a suitable foster home.

EMILY

How long is that going to take?

NANCY

You're asking me questions you know the answer to. Three to six weeks. Surely you can manage that long.

EMILY

I don't want her anymore. I'm done. That's it.

Nancy grimaces. Scary lady.

NANCY

Now you look. I put my reputation, quite possibly my career, on the line for you. Don't embarrass me. You make this work.

EMILY
How do I make it work if it's not
working?

NANCY
However! Find a way!

INT. HARDWARE STORE - DAY

A CLERK stops in an aisle, hands Emily a DEADBOLT from a shelf.

HARDWARE CLERK
That what you're looking for?

EMILY
(nods)
Thanks.

He walks off. Emily weighs the deadbolt in hand. Puts it down and picks up the next larger size. Grabs a second one just to be safe. A third for good measure.

INT. LUCY'S ROOM, EMILY'S HOUSE - DAY

With urgency Emily removes all her backup files from the shelf in Lucy's room. Dropping them in banker's boxes. Stops on Diego's. Eyes his photo. Drops it in. Grabs the office phone, boxes it with the files.

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE - DAY

Emily unplugs the phone in the kitchen. Unplugs the one by the sofa.

Opens the closet and tosses the phones inside with the banker's boxes she put there. Closes the door. Locks it. Hides the key.

Just then, a FLASHING RED LIGHT draws her gaze to the window -

A SCHOOL BUS

stopping at the end of the block. Emily crosses to the window, watching as

LUCY

gets off and comes up the sidewalk toward the house. Sensing Emily's stare, she stops and meets it. Waves, testing the waters. Emily waves back but it's a hollow gesture. Lucy's smile fades, knowing this as she continues toward the house.

In a sudden panic Emily goes into the kitchen, grabs one of the knives. Eyes the blade, forced to contemplate the unthinkable - its use as a weapon, self-defense.

She comes into the living room, holding it. Catches sight of herself in the mirror. A jarring image:

Sweet Emily Jennings with a butcher's knife in her hand.

The sound of LUCY'S FOOTSTEPS on the front steps breaks the spell.

Emily hides the knife behind the fish tank. No good, you can see it through the glass.

We hear LUCY'S KEY IN THE LOCK.

Emily grabs the knife. It's in her hand as the door CLICKS open, until the last second when she tosses it under a sofa pillow.

Lucy enters. Shy. Innocent. A ten-year-old home from school.

LUCY

Hi.

Emily returns a plastic smile.

EMILY

Hi.

LUCY

You weren't there so I took the bus.

EMILY

Sorry, work - lost track of time.

LUCY

It's okay, I know how busy you are.

Emily watches unnerved as Lucy crosses to the sofa, to the very pillow where she hid the butcher's knife, and sits down to untie her shoes. The point of the knife is almost touching her leg. If she moves at all, it will cut the skin.

LUCY

Doesn't matter anyway, the bus stops right at the end of the street. So I can always get home, whether you're there or not.

EMILY

Lucky.

Lucy nods then pauses and looks at the pillow, or appears to, but she is actually looking at the end table.

LUCY

Where's the phone?

EMILY

Oh, it wasn't working...

Lucy nods oh. Finishes untying her shoes then gets up and walks into the kitchen, checks the wall, turns to Emily.

LUCY

Wow. That one, too.

Emily, caught in a lie, says nothing.

LUCY

Can I have a shower? We had gym today...

Emily nods. Lucy heads into the bathroom. Pauses at the door, back turned.

LUCY

Are they being nice to her?

EMILY

Who?

LUCY

My mother.

She turns for Emily's reaction.

EMILY

How - how would I know that?

LUCY

I thought you said you were going to see her.

EMILY

I never said that.

Lucy frowns. A bewilderment that seems genuine.

LUCY

Hm. I must have dreamt it.

Goes into the bathroom. Closes the door.

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE - DAY

Ear pressed to the bathroom door, Emily listens to the
RUNNING WATER: Lucy taking a shower.

She goes to the closet, unlocks it. Grabs one of the phones.

INT. EMILY'S KITCHEN - DAY

It sounds like EMILY'S VOICE is coming from the fridge until
we sweep past it to see her crouching by a phone jack in the
corner. Whispering.

EMILY

I don't care, Robin, anywhere. Just find
somewhere that will take her. Tonight.
I don't want this girl in my house.

Emily unplugs the phone. And just then hears a SOFT BREATH
behind her. Oh shit. Slowly turns.

LUCY IN A BATH ROBE BEHIND HER.

Hair dripping wet. A chilling stare. How much did she hear?
Lucy walks out. We hear her bedroom door close.

Emily crouched in the corner, holding the phone, terrified at
the thought of what's in store.

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

THE HEAD OF A TURNING SCREW - Emily installing a DEADBOLT on
her door in the middle of the night.

It's the third lock, the other two already in place. Hands
trembling, she lines up the last screw. It slips from her
fingers. ROLLS UNDER THE DOOR.

She cracks opens the door. Reaches to grab it and lets out a
SHRIEK, recoiling -

FEET

standing just outside her door.

LUCY, IN PAJAMAS, HOLDING THE SCREW

She hands it back to Emily, making no overt acknowledgement
of it.

LUCY

Good night.

She walks down the hallway to her bedroom.

As soon as Lucy's door closes, Emily closes hers and goes back to work, doublespeed. Winds that last screw into the wood and then slides-to the heavy bolts.

CLUNK. CLUNK. CLUNK.

Scooting backwards, she sits against the bed, wide-eyed with terror, screwdriver clutched in her fist like a stabbing weapon.

EXT. OLD STONE CHURCH - DAY

A bell TOLLS in a steeple.

Down below, Emily is going against the tide, walking up the steps past CHURCHGOERS who are coming down after morning mass. Halfway up, she runs into Mike Barron and his wife and son. It's awkward, more for her than him.

BARRON

Emily...?

EMILY

Mike.

EXT. CHURCH PARK - DAY

Sitting on a bench in a park that occupies the shadow of the old stone church, Emily and Mike talk privately. His wife pushing his young son on a playground swing.

EMILY

'No such thing as a bad kid, only bad parents.' I always believed that. It's a lie. Her parents aren't crazy.

BARRON

You wanna end up where they did keep talking like this.

(off her look)

I'm not judging you. You're grieving for Doug and you're still confused about what Diego did.

EMILY

Aren't you?

BARRON

Diego grew up in a bad home, he saw violence and he repeated it, that's the cycle, you know that better than anyone.

EMILY

Why did she lie about calling him?

BARRON

'Cause she's a liar, that doesn't mean she made him do it. Look, let me tell you what Lucy is. Lucy is a damaged child, a deceitful child, a manipulative child. But a damaged, deceitful, manipulative child is not a demon. Ask my brother-in-law, he's got a couple of 'em.

Barron stands from the bench.

EMILY

Mike, you know I'm not crazy. Don't run away from something just because it scares you.

His concern edges toward sadness. He indicates the church.

BARRON

I stopped you on the steps. I think maybe you oughta go all the way in.

Walks off to rejoin his wife and son. Emily alone on a bench in the shadow of a church.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE GROUP THERAPY - DAY

The circle of abused children. Lucy among them, a happy participant. Nancy filling in for Doug.

It's EMILY'S POV - as she spies on Lucy through the window, second-guessing herself for a moment.

Session over, Nancy dismisses the group with a smile and theatrical applause.

Emily watches Lucy cross the room. At the coat rack, she whispers something to another girl. The veil of Lucy's hair partially obscures her profile, but through that veil Emily sees something chilling. For a moment, a moment so fleeting it might just be a trick of the eyes -

LUCY'S LIPS APPEAR THICKER, MORE MASCULINE, SPEAKING CAUSTIC WORDS THAT HOLD THE OTHER GIRL CAPTIVE.

Emily draws a sharp inward breath. Lucy, feeling Emily's stare now, turns to meet it. Her SWEET INNOCENT GIRL LIPS widening into a smile.

But Emily knows what she saw. She throws open the door and rushes in.

INT. GROUP THERAPY ROOM - DAY

Grabs Lucy by the arm and yanks her bodily from the room. This, to the amazement of Nancy, the other children -

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE GROUP THERAPY - DAY

- and to the shock of the other PARENTS waiting outside. Nancy comes after her in a fury. Runs her down. Erupts.

NANCY

Who do you think you are barging in there like that?!

EMILY

I don't want her in group anymore, I don't want her around the other kids.

NANCY

Well that's not your decision, is it?!

Emily opens her mouth to reply, but Lucy beats her to the punch.

LUCY

It's okay, Nancy, Emily's been under a lot of stress lately, but she's really nice to me and I hope I can stay with her a really long time.

Nancy, disarmed by the glowing praise, turns back to Emily.

NANCY

We'll talk about this later.

Storms off.

LUCY

See you next week, Nancy.

Nancy doesn't hear, busily reassuring parents, damage control. Emily and Lucy arrive at the elevator. Emily hits the button.

EMILY

You're never going back there.

LUCY

Why, Emily?

Emily says nothing. Lucy keeps asking the same question, in the exact same intonation, as Emily ignores her:

LUCY
Why, Emily? Why, Emily? Why, Emily?

DING. The doors open.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Emily and Lucy step in. The door closes. Lucy continuing her verbal assault as they start to descend:

LUCY
Why, Emily? Why, Emily?

Suddenly the ELEVATOR LURCHES TO A VIOLENT STOP. It buckles Emily's knees. She is terrified, practically hyperventilating.

EMILY
W-w-what's happening - ?!

Lucy has gotten her attention.

LUCY
Can I go back to group next week?

EMILY
You're never going back there!

Lucy looks at her as one regards a small dumb animal. Then looks up at the ceiling.

LUCY
Are you sure?

Horror as Emily realizes what she's thinking. We hear the first CABLE SNAP above them. In the CREAKING HUSH that follows:

EMILY
No...

The second CABLE SNAPS. The elevator goes into a HELLISH FREE FALL.

The acceleration is dizzying.

Emily clutches the rail with both hands, SCREAMING as the elevator goes cannonballing down the shaft. Lucy indifferent as they plummet toward certain death.

The floor indicator light races toward L, the car shuddering violently, the noise deafening. It's a horrible way to die.

Emily closes her eyes in anticipation of impact. And in the sudden BLACKNESS there's no noise at all. Just a soft, distinct

DING.

A breathless pause then Emily opens her eyes. And sees the elevator is no longer falling. Never was. The doors glide open to the first floor lobby.

Lucy gives her a quiet look and strolls out. A businessman steps into the elevator, watching bewildered as Emily releases her white-knuckled grip on the railing and staggers out, so badly shaken she can barely stand...

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Fish swim languidly in the tank. It's after midnight. We're looking down the darkened hall at Emily's closed bedroom door.

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Emily, in a coat and shoes, packing a suitcase. Snaps it quietly shut. Looks over at the barricaded door. Draws a tense breath.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

From down the hall we hear the DEADBOLTS SLIDE QUIETLY OPEN.

The door opens a crack.

EMILY'S TERRIFIED FACE peers out. Making sure the hall is empty.

She steps out, suitcase in hand.

Tiptoes down the hall. Quietly as possible as she comes past Lucy's door. It's open a crack. The room pitch black inside. Emily steps closer, breath held. Peers in through the little crack. Sees -

LUCY ASLEEP IN BED.

But suddenly her EYES SNAP OPEN. Her face horizontal on the pillow.

LUCY
I can see you.

Emily backs away. Goes quickly to the front door.

INT. EMILY'S CAR - NIGHT

Emily throws the suitcase in the trunk. Slams it shut. Comes around to the driver's side door. Jumps in. Closes the door. And gets the scare of her life.

LUCY IS SITTING IN THE PASSENGER SEAT!

Emily recoils with a SCREAM, throwing her body against the window behind her. Lucy sits there, silent, betrayed.

It's too much for Emily. She breaks down. Buries her face in her hands and sobs.

Lucy, after a moment, takes a brush from Emily's bag and starts lovingly brushing her hair.

Emily slowly lifts her head, resigning herself to this latest horror. She sits zombie-like behind the wheel, tears streaming as Lucy tugs gently at the snarls, playing mommy.

LUCY

Don't be sad. This is your new beginning.

INT. EMILY'S CUBICLE - DAY

Unopened mail and new case files piling up. Emily looks terrible, phone to ear, getting SCREAMED at, sworn at, interrupted every time she tries to speak.

EMILY

Mrs Lynch, I told you - will you let - that's not what I said - no, I did not - you never sent me the - Mrs Lynch - will you let me respond? - will you let me - Mrs Lynch - will you let -

Emily can't take it anymore. She unloads.

EMILY

SHUT THE FUCK UP YOU MISERABLE MISERABLE WOMAN BEFORE I GET IN MY CAR AND COME OVER THERE AND BEAT YOUR ASS LIKE YOU BEAT YOUR SON! I HAVE YOUR ADDRESS! THINK ABOUT THAT NEXT TIME YOU CALL AND SWEAR AT ME! I KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE!

Slams the phone down. Sits there looking rather dazed. Wayne arrives, dazed in a different way, having overheard.

WAYNE

Um, so, I notice you haven't taken any personal days. Come on, you look like crap, go home.

Emily levels a withering stare.

EMILY

I don't want to go home.

EXT. LOS ANGELES APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Emily knocking on a door in an outside hallway. It opens. It's the girl from the bar. BECCA. The friend. Not expecting her.

BECCA

Emily...

INT. BECCA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Emily, disheveled, five days without sleep, doing her best to appear rational.

EMILY

I know I haven't been a great friend lately, but... do you think maybe I could crash here for a couple of nights?

BECCA

Sure, when?

EMILY

Tonight and tomorrow.

Becca draws air through her teeth, pained by her predicament.

BECCA

Em, any other weekend you know I'd say yes, but I just met this guy and he's coming over tonight like for the night and it might be, you know, kinda weird.

Emily nods. And there's nothing more to be said.

INT. EMILY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Stormy night. Heavy rain. High winds. The trees, thrashing outside the window, backlit by a streetlight, cast OMINOUS SHADOWS on the walls of the bedroom.

Emily huddles in the corner, wrapped in a blanket, clutching the screwdriver.

There is a KNOCK on the bedroom door. Emily's EYES JERK WIDE OPEN. She looks at the door, but doesn't answer.

After a moment, Lucy's voice, innocent, afraid -

LUCY (O.S.)

Emily...? Can I come in? I'm scared...

Emily says nothing. Heart racing. There's another KNOCK. A little louder.

LUCY (O.S.)

Emily? Please? I know you're in there,
please...?

Emily says nothing. Lucy starts pounding on the door.

LUCY (O.S.)

Please, Emily...

SILENCE.

Emily listening, barely breathing. Is that it? Is she gone?

And then suddenly - WHAM! - WHAM! - WHAM! - the pounding turns VIOLENT, practically shaking the door off its hinges. Far too violent for a little girl.

Emily wedges herself into the corner, absolutely petrified. There is something very strong and very angry on the other side of that door, SHRIEKING in the voice of a child -

LUCY (O.S.)

LET ME IN!

WHAM - WHAM - WHAM - WHAM - WHAM - WHAM!

LUCY (O.S.)

LET ME IN!

WHAM - WHAM - WHAM - WHAM - WHAM - WHAM! The door getting absolutely pummeled, looking like it might splinter from the force. And it's so intense that it's almost surreal what Emily is seeing. Lucy's voice eerily monotone, the words coming inhumanly fast like some auctioneer from hell -

LUCY (O.S.)

Let me in, let me in, let me in, let me
in, let me in, let me in, let me in, let
me in, let me in, let me in...

Relentless. Tormenting Emily. Until she can't take it anymore. And she SCREAMS as loud as she can, half cursing, half begging, the veins standing out in her neck -

EMILY
LEAVE ME ALONE!!!

And the POUNDING STOPS DEAD. All we hear is the rain drumming on the roof. And Emily's QUICK TERRIFIED BREATHS as she stares at the door wondering what's next.

But there's nothing. Just the shadows dancing on the walls. It appears the nightmare is over for now.

But not quite.

A sudden CLUNK in the closet makes her jump. Her head snaps around - what was that? She just stares, unable to breathe because whatever she just heard is INSIDE HER ROOM!

White-knuckled grip on that screwdriver, Emily stands up and comes slowly over to the CLOSET DOOR.

Raises the screwdriver. Ready to stab.

Takes hold of the door handle.

Slowly turns it.

Opens the door.

PITCH BLACK inside.

A tense pause as she stares into that blackness, then reaches a hand into the closet, feeling around for the pull-string. Finds it. Gives it a tug. And there, right in front of her, is a vision of unspeakable horror:

MARGARET SHERIDAN

Twitching spasmodically in a hospital gown. HIDEOUSLY BURNED.

She comes at Emily arms flailing, clumsy with rage and dementia. Emily leaps aside and Margaret goes careening into the furniture, howling and spinning like some crazed Whirling Dervish.

Emily scrambles over the bed. Reaches the door. Fumbles at the deadbolt. Here comes Margaret. At the last second Emily gets the door open. Runs out.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Tears a path down the dark hallway. Margaret right behind her, hideous, reeling, hitting the walls with her flailing arms.

Emily throws open the front door.

EXT. EMILY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dashes from the house into the abandoned street. Running in the rain. Margaret comes crashing out of the house, chasing her down the middle of the street.

Emily sees a city bus parked up ahead. Makes a run for it.

EXT. METRO BUS - NIGHT

A metro transit bus idling along the curb. The DRIVER with his feet up between shifts, reading a porno mag. Emily comes running up to the door. Pounds frantically on the glass.

EMILY
Help me! Please!

The driver meets eyes with her through the door. Keeps reading. Unimpressed. More pounding from Emily.

EMILY
Let me on!

The driver points to the sign above the door: OUT OF SERVICE. Keeps reading. Emily near hysterics at this point. Margaret closing in fast.

EMILY
She's coming! Please!

The driver sighs, weighing his obligations. Emily spins, back to the door. Margaret nearly upon her, ten feet away, five, four...

INT. METRO BUS - NIGHT

The driver opens the door. Emily dives backwards onto the bus, the door snapping closed in front of her just as Margaret lunges for her throat.

EMILY
Drive!

BUS DRIVER
There's nobody out there.

EMILY

DRIVE!

BUS DRIVER

There - is - nobody - out - there!

It sinks in the second time. Emily scans the sidewalk, the darkened streets outside the bus. Margaret is gone. Was never there. The driver opens the door, nods to her - out.

EXT. METRO BUS - NIGHT

With a hydraulic HISS the bus releases its brakes and diesels off down the empty street. Emily stands alone. Rain-soaked. Shivering. Staring at her house down the block.

The SILHOUETTE OF A CHILD in the window.

INT. CHILD SERVICES DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

Wayne and his BOYFRIEND shake rain off an umbrella as they cross the darkened office.

BOYFRIEND

(re: the office space)

No, I like it. It's like those things
they put baby cows in to make veal -

The boyfriend slows as they go past a cubicle. Saw something weird.

WAYNE

What?

He points. Freaked. Wayne comes over, pokes his head in a cubicle.

EMILY

head down on her desk, rain-soaked, sleeping in her chair.

WAYNE

Em...?

No reply. Wayne's face darkens. Is she dead? He comes over, puts his hand on her shoulder.

WAYNE

Emily...?

She awakens with a jolt. Expecting to see Margaret. She looks terrible.

WAYNE

Jesus - are you okay?

EMILY

(hoarse whisper)

I... I had some things to catch up on...

She fumbles unconvincingly at some loose paperwork.

WAYNE

You look like shit, you need to see a doctor.

EMILY

I saw a doctor.

WAYNE

What did they say?

EMILY

(loses it)

They said mind your own fucking business!

Shocked by the outburst, by her general appearance, he walks away, muttering to his boyfriend. Emily puts her head in her hands, pressing down at her temples. Wayne steps into his office in the b.g. and grabs something then they exit.

And the office is quiet again. Emily closes her eyes. Just then, she hears -

A faint CYCLICAL SQUEAKING NOISE in the cubicle right next to hers. Goes rigid. Recognizes the sound. Calls over the partition without moving.

EMILY

Wayne...?

No reply, but the SQUEAKING CONTINUES. Rising slowly from her seat, scared as hell, she leans over her desk and peers over the partition into the adjacent cubicle.

It's empty. But the OFFICE CHAIR IS TURNING as if someone were just playing there.

Emily steps slowly back. And now hears the same CYCLICAL SQUEAKING behind her. The opposite row. She spins.

EXT. CHILD SERVICES DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

Walks slowly from her cubicle. Comes along the row of darkened cubicles, following the sound to its source. This is the one. She looks in.

Empty cubicle. TURNING CHAIR.

Emily backs away. Terrified. The chair winding slowly to a stop.

Suddenly, behind her, at the far end of the office, a different NOISE splits the silence. Emily turns and stares toward the sound. The XEROX MACHINE. Someone is using it.

EMILY

Hello...?

No answer.

Emily comes slowly down the aisle to the partitioned workstation. A torturous walk set to the RHYTHMIC CADENCE of the photocopier, the HARSH GREEN LIGHT SWEEPING ACROSS THE CEILING ABOVE IT, again and again and again...

And then it stops, ejecting one final page as Emily enters the workstation. And sees there's no one there.

She stares at the idle machine for a moment, then at the STACK OF COPIES lying upsidedown in the tray. She comes over, picks them up. Turns them over.

The first page is a photocopy of a PAIR OF HANDS PRESSED FLAT AGAINST THE COPYING GLASS.

Emily stares, haunted. Tense breath. Continues through the stack.

Successive pages show the same two hands, but leaning forward into the inky blackness between them is a FACE, its features resolving into murky focus as it approaches the glass. The last page is a horrific image. A man screaming in such terror that his face appears almost deformed.

It's DOUG. The night of his death. Like a snapshot from his bathroom mirror.

Emily shudders, the stack of pages tumbling to the floor. Runs out. And we see the photocopies, lying on the floor, are totally BLANK...

INT. CORRIDOR, CHILD SERVICES BUILDING - NIGHT

Emily, leaving, rushes down a corridor toward the lobby. Tense. Head on a swivel. Hears MORE SQUEAKING behind her. Spins.

A NIGHT JANITOR WHEELING A MOP BUCKET

She walks on. Turns the corner and RUNS INTO SOMEONE UNEXPECTED. Jumps back with a SHRIEK before she realizes who it is.

EMILY

Robin...

A ponytailed woman in her mid-forties, the child placement specialist Emily called from home.

ROBIN

What are you doing here so late? I tried calling you. I found someone to take Lucy.

EMILY

(stunned relief)
You did?

ROBIN

Anaheim couple. They've helped us out before.

She shows Emily a custody form with an attached photo:

A KIND HUSBAND AND WIFE WITH TWO YOUNG CHILDREN.

Emily's face darkens.

EMILY

(under her breath)
Oh God...

ROBIN

What's the matter?

Emily stares at the unsuspecting family. Lucy's next victims. She fends off a wave of emotion as the full horror of her predicament hits her. Then, matter-of-factly, facing that fear head-on:

EMILY

I can't. I'm keeping her.

As Emily walks off, ripping the custody form to shreds, Robin utterly confused...

INT. STATE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - DAY

Emily sits opposite Edward Sheridan in the visiting room, an odd sense of camaraderie between them.

EMILY

If I get rid of her, if I put her into the system...

EDWARD

(nods yup)

She starts all over again somewhere else. Can't let her stay, can't let her go. That leaves you with one option.

Eye contact. Emily looks away, shakes her head.

EMILY

I can't, Edward, I --

EDWARD

You have to. You have to find the strength. Don't you understand? That's why she's doing this. To test you. Test your faith.

EMILY

I don't have any faith.

EDWARD

How 'bout anger. Got some of that?

Emily lowers her gaze to the table.

EMILY

How... how do I...?

EDWARD

Kill her? In her sleep, assuming you can...

(then; thinking)

Tell you what I'd do different. Count myself dead at the outset. Accept that going in and use it to my advantage. That's the one thing I don't think she'd see coming, someone giving up their own life to take hers.

As Emily registers this...

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Middle of the night, the living room is lit by the eerie glow of the fish tank. The filter humming. The fish swimming languidly. Suddenly they DISPERSE, spooked by something outside the tank.

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The bureau has been pushed in front of the deadbolted door to form a barricade. Emily lies in a fetal position on her bed, exhausted but unable to sleep.

She tenses at the sound of a MUFFLED MALE VOICE in the other room. Comes over to the door, trying to listen. Thinks she recognizes it.

EMILY
(calls through door)
Mike...?

No reply.

A moment of indecision then Emily tightens her grip on the screwdriver and quietly slides open the deadbolts.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

She comes slowly down the hall, following the VOICE to its source, stops in the living room doorway, haunted...

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

THE TELEVISION

Edward's psych interview playing to the empty room. He's straightjacketed, sedated. Talking directly to the camera.

EDWARD
Where is she now? Some family somewhere?

INTERVIEWER
Why does that concern you, Edward?

EDWARD
'Cause you have to warn them.

Emily turns off the tv. IMMEDIATELY IT SWITCHES ITSELF BACK ON. Emily freezes, realizing the room is not empty. Turning, she sees Lucy sitting in the shadows holding the remote. Lucy mutes the sound and returns Emily's stare, thoughtful, almost empathetic.

LUCY
I like it here. I like you. You want me
to like you, don't you?

Emily nods. The room bathed in the tv's flickering blue light. Lucy is quiet for a moment. Then, in her innocently menacing voice, explains the rules:

LUCY

You have to do what I say. If I say I want to go to group, you have to do it. If I say I want a new dress, you have to do it. If I say I want ice cream every day after school, you have to do it. Okay?

Emily gives a haunted nod, remembering:

A FLASHCUT of Lucy sitting between Edward and Margaret at the Child Services meeting, new dress, ribbon in her hair, licking her ice cream with a wicked little smile.

BACK TO SCENE

Lucy stares coldly at the television: Margaret speaking with the sound off.

LUCY

They did what I said for a while and then they stopped and started with the secrets. But they weren't really secrets I guess...

(looks at Emily)
...because I always knew what they were thinking.

She holds Emily's gaze then looks back at the tv. Margaret's image reflected in the pupils of her eerie unblinking eyes.

INT. MARGARET'S PADDED ROOM, PSYCH HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Margaret, straps unbuckled, sits on the bed beside a YOUNG NURSE who checks her temperature. Done, the Nurse heads out.

MARGARET

Don't leave me.

Terror in Margaret's voice.

YOUNG NURSE

It's okay, Maggie. I'll check on you later.

The Nurse exits. Locks the door.

CLICK-KA-THUNK. The sound of doom to Margaret.

She stands up, looking around, trembling at what's to come. Her footsteps sound oddly HOLLOW, METALLIC on the floor.

MARGARET'S POV - surveying the room, we see what Margaret's hell looks like. It's not a room she's living in...

AN OLD OVEN

With dark scorched metal walls. A bolted-down bed to one side, perfectly white, like a practical joke.

We can hear the low HISS of it filling with gas. The faint POOF as it ignites beneath her. The first SHIMMERING WAVES OF HEAT rising up, singeing her hair.

Margaret runs screaming to the door, claws at the pane of glass like a madwoman. But there is no escape from the hell of her own mind. The YOUNG NURSE'S FACE APPEARS there in the window, shocked by Margaret's insane rantings.

INT. PSYCH HOSPITAL CAFETERIA - NIGHT

Edward, dinner tray in hand, going through the cafeteria line with other INSTITUTIONAL PATIENTS.

He sits down at a table and starts eating, quiet, lost in his thoughts. Takes another mouthful of food and suddenly stops chewing, noticing something very strange:

A BALD, MORBIDLY OBESE INMATE SITTING DIRECTLY ACROSS THE TABLE IS CUTTING PEAS IN HALF ON HIS PLATE, ABSENTLY, BUT WITH AN ALMOST SURGICAL PRECISION, EATING THEM ONE BY ONE OFF THE TIP OF HIS KNIFE!!

He lifts his gaze to Edward. Smiles a knowing, taunting smile. Then his WIDE WET MOUTH speaks in a little girl's voice:

LUCY'S VOICE

I'm happy you're getting the help you need, daddy.

Edward goes berserk. Launches himself across the table at the guy, stabbing him in the neck with his fork. Vicious attack. Unprovoked as far as anyone else is concerned. A guard rushes over. Edward turns on him, maniacal.

THE GUARD SHOOTS HIM DEAD.

As blood pools around Edward's body, some LUNATIC who witnessed the event starts to applaud. Others join in. It's the most excitement they've seen all year. And as the applause spreads through the entire cafeteria...

EXT. EMILY'S HOUSE - DAY

Emily comes down the steps, past the morning paper on the walkway. Stops dead in her tracks. Stunned. Comes back and picks it up.

A SMALL PHOTO OF EDWARD ON THE FRONT PAGE WITH A HEADLINE: HOSPITAL PROBES DEATH.

At the bus stop at the end of the street, Lucy mingles happily with other CHILDREN. She meets Emily's gaze down the length of the sidewalk. Smiles and waves goodbye as she gets on the school bus.

INT. BARRON'S OFFICE, POLICE STATION - DAY

Emily drops the newspaper on Barron's desk. The headline about Edward speaks for itself.

BARRON

I know...

It's a different Mike Barron than last we saw. Gone is the quiet assurance. Whatever happened rocked him to the core. He closes the door for privacy.

BARRON

There's something I want you to hear.
Came in at two o'clock last night. You
might wanna sit.

Emily sits. Barron cues a voicemail message on his phone, plays it over the speaker. After a BEEP we hear it. A SINISTER MALE VOICE, guttural, taunting, the voice of a demon:

SINISTER MALE VOICE

(mocking his earlier line)
'It's hard sometimes to tell the truth,
but I know you will 'cause you're a good
little girl...'
(then; intimate)
Twenty years in the trenches, can't make
Lieutenant? Hurts, doesn't it? Shakes
your faith sometimes. You know why they
keep passing you over? Do you, Michael?
'Cause you're soft. Soft, soft, soft...

DELIRIOUS LAUGHTER followed by a CLICK and a DIAL TONE.
Emily's mouth gapes. After a moment:

BARRON

You're right. She called Doug. Took me an extra couple of days to get your cell phone records. That's what she's been using.

Grim pause. Emily digs through her bag. Reaches the bottom. No cell phone. Staring into the bag, voice wavering with emotion:

EMILY

She's taking me apart, Mike.

She loses it for a second. Barron sits in front of her on the edge of the desk.

BARRON

I'm gonna help you get to the bottom of this.

EMILY

(re: Edward's photo)
He told me I have to kill her.

Barron registers that in silence. Stuns her, and himself, by what he says next.

BARRON

I'll help you.

Emily looks at him. Disbelief.

BARRON

Whatever it takes.

She hugs him. A godsend.

BARRON

I'm gonna put Beth and Tim in a hotel.
Keep her at the house.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Emily buttoning her shirt after an exam.

DOCTOR

Physically you're fine. How's the stress?

EMILY

I'm not sleeping, I was hoping you could give me something.

The doctor writes on her prescription pad.

DOCTOR

Take one of these, you'll sleep.

Emily watches the pen scribble.

INT. EMILY'S CAR - DAY

A prescription pill bottle on the passenger seat. Emily, driving home, glances at it with apprehension.

EXT. HOTEL - NIGHT

A high-rise hotel in downtown Los Angeles.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Barron, saying goodbye to his WIFE and SON, sets down the overnight bags they've packed.

BARRON'S WIFE

Why won't you tell me what's going on?

BARRON

Because I can't.

Kisses her. Turns to his son.

BARRON

Take care of your mom.

Musses the boy's hair and leaves.

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Barron strides down the corridor, his face reflecting the grim task ahead.

INT. HOTEL PARKING STRUCTURE - NIGHT

His footsteps echo in the parking structure as he walks along a row of parked cars.

A faint JANGLING SOUND stops him dead in his tracks. He turns and scans the garage behind him. It's quiet, eerily still.

He continues onward, but hears the faint JANGLING SOUND again a moment later. Spins, trying to place it. There it is again. Closer this time. Something moving, hiding, behind the rows of cars over there.

He bends, trying to get a look under the cars. Can't see anything. Unnerved, he moves on, clicks the button on his keychain remote. The lights flash on his car fifty yards away.

But as he continues toward it they reveal themselves, trodding into view from between the cars, CHOKE-CHAIN COLLARS JANGLING around their necks...

THREE PIT BULLS

Battle-scarred. Vicious. The dogs from Diego's house. They sit down right in front of Barron's car. It's a surreal moment, a trio of attack dogs sitting at quiet attention, square-jawed, black-eyed, the kinetic calm before a predator strikes.

Barron draws his gun. Fires a warning shot over their heads.

BANG!

Deafeningly loud, it echoes through the garage like a thunderclap. But the dogs don't move, just sit there staring.

Barron lowers his gun. It's time to get the hell out of here. He backpedals, making no sudden movements, gun still trained on the dogs.

They watch him, eyes livening with excitement, one of their back legs twitching in anticipation.

Barron quickens his step and that's their cue.

ALL AT ONCE, WITH EXPLOSIVE SPEED, THE DOGS SPRING INTO MOTION, VICIOUS AND MUSCLED AND SMELLING BLOOD.

Barron fires an errant shot and takes off running. But he can't match their pace, the deadly trio race along the row of police cruisers, closing the gap with ease.

At the last second Barron jumps the partition. The pit bulls crash skull-first into the concrete, but continue their pursuit unfazed as Barron takes off up the adjoining ramp.

He jumps up onto the row of cars and runs across the hoods, denting the metal. The dogs jump up behind him, relentless in their pursuit.

Jaws snapping at his heels, Barron takes to the car roofs, the pitbulls leaping from car to car behind him.

He looks back just in time to see the dogs launch themselves. They hit him at chest height, sinking teeth in his flesh.

Stumbling forward, struggling to keep their jaws from his throat, Barron doesn't see what's coming. The last car. The edge of the parking garage.

He's over the edge before he even understands, flailing his arms for a handhold that doesn't exist. The ground, far below, flies up at him in a rush of acceleration.

We hear a sickening THUD and find Barron lying face down on the pavement below, blood pooling around him. Clinging to life, he opens his eyes and sees the TRIO OF PIT BULLS SITTING OBEDIENTLY BESIDE HIM, unharmed, watching.

But from a distance we see there is only Barron. Dying alone between the parked cars. No dogs anywhere in sight.

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Emily opens the front door, peers in, trying not to make a sound.

EMILY

Lucy...?

No reply. She enters. Sees -

THE CLOSET DOOR IS OPEN.

She comes closer.

EMPTY BANKER BOXES strewn in the hall. SCATTERED PAGES.

At the far end, the light is on in Lucy's bedroom. The door open a crack. A shaft of light spilling out into the darkened hallway.

Emily comes down the hallway past SCATTERED FILE PAGES. Preliminary reports. Medical records. Personality profiles...

She opens the door to Lucy's room.

INT. LUCY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Freezes in the doorway, shocked by what lies before her.

EMILY

Oh my God...

Black eyes. Bloody noses. Bruises. Cuts. Burns. PHOTOS OF ABUSED CHILDREN COVER THE ENTIRE FLOOR. A collage of misery.

Lucy is nowhere to be seen. Emily comes in and starts quickly picking them up.

Tucked between the file cabinet and the wall is a CORKBOARD. Emily pulls it out. It's covered with PHOTOS FROM WORK. COWORKERS. HER KIDS. Two of the photos are turned around. She flips them over in rapid succession. Diego. Doug.

She rips all the photos from the board.

Photos bunched in her hands, she heads for the door, but hears something that stops her in her tracks -

A strange INTERMITTENT BUZZING NOISE

It lasts two seconds and stops. She turns around, scans the room. Puts down the stack of photos. There it is again:

BZZZZZZZZZZZZT. BZZZZZZZZZZZZT.

Sounds like a housefly trapped against a window, but it's bigger, angrier, and appears to be coming from the

KNOTTED RUG

at the foot of Lucy's bed. Emily crosses to it. The BUZZING STOPS. She bends. Takes hold of a corner. Peels it slowly back to reveal

BARE FLOOR

Weird. Nothing there.

BZZZZZZZZZZZZT! BZZZZZZZZZZZZT!

Emily straightens, turns. It's coming from the

BED

As she approaches it the BUZZING INTENSIFIES, louder, more agitated.

Pauses as she gets there, terrified of what she might find, the bed BUZZING FURIOUSLY FROM WITHIN. Something is trapped under those blankets, waiting for release.

Emily extends a trembling hand, takes hold of the blankets and, slowly, rigid with fear, peels them back to reveal

BARE MATTRESS

Impossible, because the BUZZING IS LOUDER THAN EVER.

With a tense swallow Emily realizes it's coming from lower, deeper within the bed, between the mattress and the box spring.

She slips her fingers into the crack.

And slowly lifts the mattress, the BUZZING GROWING FRIGHTENINGLY LOUD as its source is exposed, something hellish waiting for her as she cranes her neck and look to see what lies below -

HER CELL PHONE

Vibrating. BZZZZZZZZZT. BZZZZZZZZZZT. On the viewscreen: "INCOMING CALL..."

She picks it up. Stares at it vibrating in her hand. Presses the TALK button. Brings it to her ear.

The LOW STATIC of an open line. Then, a RASPY MALE VOICE:

MALE VOICE ON PHONE

Emily...

Emily flinches.

EMILY

Who is this...?

MALE VOICE ON PHONE

It's Wayne, Emily, I just got a call, Mike's dead...

Emily, stunned, barely able to speak.

EMILY

No... he's...

WAYNE (V.O.)

They don't know if he fell or what happened...

Emily's phone hand drops to her side in shock. From down there, we hear Wayne's voice:

WAYNE (V.O.)

Emily? Emily, are you okay...?

After a moment, she lifts it.

EMILY

I have to go.

Hangs up. On the brink of emotional collapse. Her only confidante dead.

Just then she hears BREATHING from behind the open door. Someone or something hiding in that dark corner over there. She crosses to it. Pulls back the door and there sits

LUCY

quiet, innocent, chin on her knees.

EMILY

What did you do to him?

Lucy says nothing. Emily grabs her by the arm. Yanks her to her feet.

EMILY

WHAT DID YOU DO TO HIM?!

After a moment:

LUCY

He did it to himself.

WHACK! Emily slaps her. Hard across the face. Knocks her to the floor. Lucy sits up, lip split. Tastes the blood with her tongue. Hint of a smile. The taste of victory.

LUCY

Europa. Ganymede. Io. Callisto. The moons of Jupiter. We got back our astronomy tests today.

It's there on the floor. A++ Well done, Lucy!

There's a LOUD BEEP in the other room. Lucy gets up and walks out. Emily watches as Lucy goes into the kitchen. Takes a bag of popcorn from the microwave. Empties it into a bowl. Sits down on the living room sofa and clicks on the tv remote, watching it like nothing ever happened. Emily walks over and pitches the tv onto the floor. The SCREEN SHATTERS.

EMILY

Get out of my house.

Lucy, unimpressed, expressionless, takes another handful of popcorn. Chews it. CRUNCH. CRUNCH. CRUNCH. Emily swats the bowl from her hands.

EMILY
GET OUT!

Flicking bits of popcorn off herself, Lucy stands up from the sofa. Her face catches the light from the hallway. Emily shudders at the sight.

Lucy's features look altered somehow, sharpened. It's subtle, but the overall effect is chilling. THE FACE OF A LITTLE GIRL LAID OVER THE MUSCULATURE OF SOMETHING MORE DEVIIOUS AND WICKED.

LUCY
Don't yell at me. My mom and dad used to yell at me.

Emily backs away, mortified, takes off down the hall.

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rushes in. Slams the door. Bolts the deadbolts. CLUNK. CLUNK. CLUNK. Moment of panic. Will they hold?

Slides her bureau in front of the door. Shoves her bed in front of the bureau just to be sure.

In the silence we hear LUCY'S FOOTSTEPS coming down the hall toward the door.

Closer, closer...

There's nothing else to block the door with. Emily backs away, trembling as

LUCY'S FOOTSTEPS arrive at the door. A tense silence. Then:

LUCY (O.S.)
Emily... I'm sorry... I didn't mean to...

Emily grabs the screwdriver, clutches it in both hands.

LUCY (O.S.)
Can I come in so we can talk and work it out?

There's a GENTLE KNOCK on the door. Emily flinches, remembering last time.

LUCY (O.S.)
Emily...?

EMILY
Stay away from me!

LUCY (O.S.)
Don't be mad. I said I was sorry. I'll
brush your hair for you.

EMILY
STAY AWAY FROM ME!!

Silence.

Then:

WHAM! The door shudders from a MAMMOTH IMPACT. Last time,
it shook the door, this time it shakes the entire wall.
Emily recoils, dropping the screwdriver.

WHAM! CRACKS APPEAR in the door as it bows from the
tremendous force.

WHAM!! CRACKS FAN OUT into the plaster around the doorframe.

WHAM!! Half the SCREWS HOLDING THE HINGES fly from the wall.

WHAM!! The DEADBOLTS BENDING from the ungodly pummeling.

WHAM!! The DEADBOLT SCREWS getting yanked from the wood.

Emily frozen in terror, watching. Whatever's out there is
coming in.

WHAM!! One of the DOOR HINGES rips clean from the wall.

WHAM!! The FIRST DEADBOLT comes flying off.

WHAM!! The SECOND DOOR HINGE gone.

WHAM!! ANOTHER DEADBOLT flies off.

WHAM!! The DOOR SPLITS down the center.

WHAM!! The THIRD DEADBOLT lands on the floor at Emily's feet
with a METAL THUD.

A breathless silence.

Then the DOOR RATTLES and drops loose from the frame with a
DEAD WOODEN CLUNK.

Nothing holding it in place now except the bureau and the
bed. And now they both start to SLIDE BACKWARDS as whatever
is on the other side starts pushing its way in.

Emily topples a high bookcase against the door and pushes back with every ounce of strength she can muster, but it's no use. The bureau overturns, CRASHES to the floor. Emily's bare feet slide backwards along with the bed.

And then they stop. The barricade sufficiently breached.

Emily, in her panic, makes a hasty decision. She hides under the bed.

We HOLD LOW on the open door as LUCY'S FEET step into the room, the feet of a child, but the BREATHING we hear sounds emphysemic and the VOICE is unquestionably male - harsh, guttural, taunting Emily as it comes for her:

SINISTER MALE VOICE

Emily...

Wide-eyed with terror under the bed, she watches those feet pick their way over the shattered remnants of the barricade.

SINISTER MALE VOICE

Emily... We need to learn healthier ways of resolving conflict, Emily.

The feet step gingerly past the overturned bureau.

SINISTER MALE VOICE

...Most families don't even know they have a problem...

The feet stop at the SCREWDRIVER.

SINISTER MALE VOICE

...until it's too late.

A HAND reaches down and picks it up, a girl's hand, but the fingers as they wrap tightly around the handle look strong and sinewy.

The feet stand motionless for a moment then turn and come toward the bed, stopping right in front of EMILY'S HORRIFIED FACE.

A pause and then, still from Emily's POV, we see Lucy lower herself onto her knees.

WHAM!! - with shocking force that hand IMPALES THE SCREWDRIVER IN THE WOODEN FLOOR!

Another pause then both hands come into view, palms flat on the hardwood, as she leans her head down.

Emily recoiling in anticipation as the face comes into view -

LUCY'S INNOCENT FACE

A little girl. With a little girl voice to match.

LUCY
(playing mommy)
What are you doing, you silly
pumpkinhead?

Emily, hyperventilating, stares in shock. Lucy reaches her hand in. Emily backs away, wedges herself in the corner.

LUCY
(playing mommy)
You don't want me to come under there and
get you, do you?

Emily, crying now, shakes her head. Lucy, almost sympathetic, frowns.

LUCY
(playing mommy)
I'm going to count to three. One...

EMILY
No...

LUCY
(playing mommy)
Two... Two and a half...

EMILY
Please...

LUCY
(playing mommy)
Two and three quarters... Three...

Lucy starts crawling under the bed.

LUCY
Here I come.

Emily tries to go backwards, but there's nowhere for her to go.

LUCY'S FACE SLIDING CLOSER LIKE THE HEAD OF A SNAKE.

Trapped, Emily screams.

EMILY
WHAT DO YOU WANT?!!

Lucy stops crawling. Folds her arms, sets her chin on them. Comfortable here under the bed. Delighting in the question.

LUCY
What you wanted from your mother. I want
you to love me.

EMILY
Okay... okay, I will, I will, I promise.

Lucy weighs Emily's surrender for a moment. Then, oddly bright:

LUCY
Come tuck me in.

EMILY
Okay... I'll be right there.

LUCY
You better come.

Lucy slithers out and we see her feet scamper from the room. Emily puts her head down on the floor and cries, covering her mouth with her hands so she won't make a sound.

INT. EMILY'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

A WHISTLING KETTLE on the stove.

Emily, still in tears, takes it from the burner. Dumps SIX SLEEPING PILLS from the prescription bottle. Crushes them with the blunt edge of a knife. Stirrs them into a cup of Chamomile tea.

She freezes at a NOISE behind her. Looks tensely over her shoulder.

The fridge.

She adds sugar, continues stirring.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

We follow the TEA CUP, in Emily's hand, as she comes nervously down the hall to Lucy's room. We can see Lucy in there, waiting for her in bed. Emily, playing the part, dries her eyes and enters.

INT. LUCY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sits down on the bed, hands Lucy the tea.

LUCY
Chamomile.

Emily nods. The face of a loving mother. Lucy brings the cup to her lips, pauses.

LUCY
Maybe you should have it, you look stressed.

EMILY
I'll have one later.

Lucy considers this, nods okay, takes a sip of tea. Emily picks up a brush and brushes Lucy's hair.

EMILY
Tomorrow's our new beginning.

LUCY
I'll be good.

EMILY
I know.

Lucy takes a few more sips and sets the tea cup on the bedside table. Emily, tucking her in, gives the cup a nervous glance. Did she drink enough?

EMILY
Get some rest.

LUCY
Say it.

EMILY
I love you.

LUCY
Forever and ever?

EMILY
Forever and ever.

Emily kisses her on the forehead. Lucy looks up at her and for a moment she's the little girl Emily met. Innocent, angelic, closing her eyes for sleep. They flutter open one last time.

LUCY

Where are you if I need you?

EMILY

Right down the hall.

Lucy's eyes shut. Emily, brushing her hair, staring at the HALF-FULL TEA CUP.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Lucy asleep in bed. Emily watches from the door, wary, expecting Lucy's eyes to snap open any second.

EMILY

Sweetheart...?

She doesn't move, dead to the world. Or is it a game? Emily closes the door. Leans against the wall, shaking, contemplating her next move.

Wedges a chair under the door handle. Time of the essence.

INT. EMILY'S GARAGE - NIGHT

Junk-filled. The door lifts to reveal Emily, silhouetted, looking in. Amid the clutter is a lawnmower. Beside it, a big can of GASOLINE.

INT. EMILY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Emily stifling sobs as she douses the walls of the house. The hallway, the bathroom, the kitchen, all of it.

TIP OF A MATCH strikes flint, ignites.

Emily stares at it for a long moment.

Lets it fall.

FLAMES SCURRY in a shimmering blue-gold sheet across the floor. Climb the walls, the entire house ablaze in a matter of seconds.

Emily sits and watches as the door to Lucy's bedroom is engulfed. It's an image straight from hell: A YOUNG WOMAN SITTING ON A SOFA IN A HOUSE OF FIRE.

The fish, frantic in their tank, catch Emily's eye. She goes over and grabs the tank.

EXT. EMILY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Smoke swirling past her, she exits the house, locking the front door behind her. She backs away and watches it burn, holding her fish tank, the only thing she saved.

TIME CUT TO:

Billowing black smoke. The house fully engulfed as fire engines arriving on the scene, sirens wailing. Emily watching with neighbors on the sidewalk as the FIREFIGHTERS uncoil their hoses.

The window to Lucy's bedroom is a bright red square, an inferno. And as Emily stares at it, disbelieving what she's done, the figure of a CHILD appears.

LUCY

Her whole body ablaze. Horrific. She just stands there, arms at her sides, burning.

Just now the FIRE MARSHALL crosses to the onlookers. Hollers over the noise and commotion:

FIRE MARSHALL
Everybody get out okay?!

Emily wavers, not sure what to say. The Fire Marshall sees her indecision.

FIRE MARSHALL
This your house?!
(she nods yes)
Anybody else inside?!
(off her hesitation)
Ma'am...?!

Emily opens her mouth to reply, but sees something behind her that closes her throat.

LUCY

standing on the sidewalk in her pajamas. Unscathed.

FIRE MARSHALL
Anyone else inside?! Yes or no?!

Emily, in shock, shakes her head no. The Fire Marshall rushes off, walkie-talkie squawking. Emily stands frozen as Lucy comes through the crowd to her. More dismayed than angry.

LUCY

That was mean.

She takes Emily's hand. Together they watch the house burn. Firelight playing on their faces. The fish bouncing off the glass in the tank at Emily's feet.

INT. EMILY'S CAR - NIGHT

The blue halflight before dawn. Emily and Lucy sit in the Volvo, eyeing the scorched remains of the house. The firecrew stowing equipment. Emily puts the car in drive.

INT. EMILY'S CAR - DAWN

The FISH FLOATING DEAD at the top of the tank in the back seat as Emily drives down the freeway at daybreak. Lucy gazing out dreamily at the sunrise.

LUCY

Maybe we can find a hotel with a swimming pool.

Emily says nothing. Lucy turns and looks at her, thoughtful, almost empathetic. She draws up her knees and rests her chin on top, levels an appraising stare at Emily like the one she leveled at Doug.

LUCY

It's sad, isn't it? How it gets passed on. How people do to their own kids what their parents did to them. That's why you got the job...

Emily turns on the radio, full volume, trying to drown out Lucy's voice. Lucy reaches over and turns it off. CLICK.

LUCY

...To prove to yourself you're not like her, that you're not like your mother. Because that scares you. Scares you more than anything.

Lucy, in mock sentiment, puts her hand on Emily's.

LUCY

I love you... even if you don't love me.

Emily looks at her, gutted. But defiant. Turning her gaze forward, she tightens her grip on the wheel and calmly, resolutely, JAMS THE GAS PEDAL TO THE FLOOR. The acceleration pitches Lucy backwards into her seat. She sits up, eyes wide, didn't see this coming. A suicide run.

LUCY

What are you doing? Slow down.

A tense smile from Lucy. The tables have turned.

LUCY

Did you hear me?

Emily stares dead ahead, red-lining the tachometer. Lucy flits her eyes skyward. IMMEDIATELY IT DARKENS AND STARTS TO RAIN. Emily turns on the wipers, speeds on, unfazed.

LUCY

I said slow down!

Emily ignores her, going eighty now, weaving through SLOWER TRAFFIC THAT FLIES TOWARD THEM OUT OF THE GRAY HAZE. Lucy, panicking, changes channels like a tv. Innocent child all of a sudden.

LUCY

Please, stop, Emily, I'll be good.

Emily ignores her, beyond apology. And Lucy's face sharpens. She points down the road.

LUCY

Look out!

Through the heavy rain we see -

A TRACTOR-TRAILER RIG CRASH THROUGH THE DIVIDING MEDIAN AND JACKKNIFE, BARRELING AT THEM HEAD-ON!

Emily goes for the brake, but reconsiders, seeing the truck for what it is: a test of faith. She welcomes it. Tightens her grip on the wheel and goes full throttle again, right at the truck. Lucy shrieks in terror.

LUCY

What are you doing?!

EMILY

It's not real.

LUCY

Yes, it is!

EMILY

Are you scared?!

Pedal to the floor. Inviting the head-on collision. You can see the BIG RIG DRIVER in the cab, wrestling frantically with the steering wheel. Lucy bracing herself, screams -

LUCY

STOP!

Emily clenches her teeth in anticipation of impact, of death.

THE CHROME GRILLWORK OF THE TRUCK RUSHES TOWARD THEM IN THAT FINAL MOMENT, THE AIR HORN DEAFENINGLY LOUD!

But the impact never comes. In the blink of an eye the truck is gone. Open road in front of them. It's not raining. Never was. The wipers SQUEAKING on a dry windshield.

Lucy sits in silence, her bag of tricks empty. Emily, triumphant, turns to her with a vindictive smile, the speedometer hitting a hundred.

EMILY

ARE YOU SCARED?!

She clutches Lucy's wrist.

EMILY

I'M NOT!!

Emily jerks the car off the road, crashing through the guardrail. Trees snapping in half across the hood as they go careening through roadside woods and down a steep embankment toward -

EXT. LOS ANGELES RESERVOIR - DAY

The car tears through a chainlink fence and leaps off the high embankment into the water.

INT. EMILY'S VOLVO - DAY

Impacts and sinks with frightening speed. Water rushing in from all sides. Emily shackles Lucy with her arms as the water rises to cover their mouths.

UNDERWATER

They stare wide-eyed at one another through the water. Hair swirling around their faces as they sink to the bottom.

LUCY'S LIPS CURL INTO THAT CREEPY MANNISH SMILE.

As though she anticipated this. Or welcomes it. Or knows something Emily does not. And now Emily sees what Lucy sees -

A FIGURE SWIMMING DOWN TOWARD THEM THROUGH THE MURKY WATER.

A HAND pries open the door and wrestles Lucy from Emily's grasp. Pulls her from the car, swimming to the surface with her. Emily is left empty-handed, stunned, alone in her watery grave.

SHE DROWNS IN STAGES, EACH ONE DIFFICULT TO WATCH, THE INITIAL FRANTIC FLAILINGS, THE HOPELESS PANIC, THE SLOW DAWNING OF ACCEPTANCE, THE MUSCLES LOOSENING, ARMS FLOATING LIMP, EYES FIXED IN A BLANK STARE.

And just when her death seems certain, a HAND grabs her by the shoulder and yanks her out the driver's side window...

EXT. BANK OF RESERVOIR - DAY

Ambulances. Patrol cars. Paramedics. Onshore, drying off with a towel, talking to a uniformed officer is the PASSERBY who saved Lucy's life.

PASSERBY

Right through the guardrail, never
touched the brakes...

Emily goes by on a gurney, semi-conscious, oxygen mask over her face. Paramedics checking her vitals.

Loaded into the ambulance, she meets the gaze of Lucy who is being attended to by a female PARAMEDIC, who puts her arm around Lucy in a maternal gesture, shielding her from the sight of Emily as Emily did of the Sheridans.

PARAMEDIC

Don't look at her, okay? Just don't even
look.

Lucy nods, the innocent victim. Clinging to her protector as she watches the ambulance take Emily Jennings away.

CUT TO:

A TELEVISION - NEWS FOOTAGE

of Lucy wrapped in a blanket sitting beside the female paramedic in an ambulance. Shivering. Wet-hair clinging to her face. Portrait of a child victim.

NEWS REPORTER

A remarkable story of survival this
morning as a young girl is pulled from
the Los Angeles reservoir in an accident
police are calling suspicious...

INSTITUTIONAL PATIENTS watching tv in the psych hospital rec room. Slouched on the vinyl sofa, watching without comprehension, heavily sedated, Margaret Sheridan.

INT. WINDOWLESS ROOM - DAY

Emily talking agitatedly to a MAN IN A SUIT who is writing something and not paying attention to her. We only see her face at first.

EMILY

Where is she? Where'd they put her?
Foster care? Is she with a family? You
have to let me talk to them...

She snatches the pen from his hand.

EMILY

Do you hear me?!

He looks at her, quietly takes back his pen.

MAN IN SUIT

I hear you.

Continues writing. There's a KNOCK on the door. A BAILIFF pokes his head in.

BAILIFF

Set.

Emily stands up from the chair she's been sitting in and we see she's wearing an ORANGE LA COUNTY JAIL JUMPSUIT. The man, her public defender, instructs her as they exit:

MAN IN SUIT

Let me do the talking in here.

EXT. PRIVATE WOODED ROAD - DAY

Lucy walks a private road through sunlit forest with a kind RETIRED COUPLE. Temporary guardians who've taken her in for the weekend.

LUCY

Why can't I live with you?

RETIRED WOMAN

Oh, darling, we're not foster parents, we
just help out when the system's full.

RETIREED MAN
They'll contact us, Lucy, when your
placement comes through.

The woman puts her arm around her as they walk on.

RETIREED WOMAN
Some nice family that always wanted a
little girl.

Lucy smiles, shy, innocent, quietly taking in the scenery.

INT. FOSTER PLACEMENT SERVICES - NIGHT

Two women cross the office after hours, a pudgy middle-aged
FOSTER CARE SUPERVISOR and a younger CASEWORKER who is
leaving for the day. The office reminds you of Child
Services, another tier of the child welfare system.

CASEWORKER
Going to the thing Saturday?

SUPERVISOR
I don't know.

CASEWORKER
Oh, you should. It'll be fun.

SUPERVISOR
Maybe I will, I don't know. We'll see.

CASEWORKER
Bye, Janey.

SUPERVISOR
See you tomorrow.

The Caseworker exits. The Supervisor comes down the row of
cubicles dropping files on desks. Alone. After hours. A
thankless profession.

It lands on some random desk, amid the usual backlog of mail
and paperwork. A case file like all the others. The name
typed on the label:

SHERIDAN, LUCY.

FADE OUT.